

FINAL REPORT

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative 2000-2006

National Centre for Guidance in Education

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments		page 3
Glossary		page 4
Executive Summary		page 5
Section One	Introduction	page 16
Section Two	Methodology	page 18
Section Three	Guidance Policy Developments	page 21
Section Four	Guidance Service Operations	page 33
Section Five	Good Practice & Strategic Issues	page 46
Section Six	Conclusions	page 62
Section Seven	Recommendations	page 69
Appendix One	Advisory Group Members	page 73
Appendix Two	CSO Small Area data on Early School Leaving	page 75
Appendix Three	Circular Letters from the Department of Education & Science	page 77
Appendix Four	AEGS Questionnaire	page 91

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Glossary

Organisations/Associations

CEE OA	Chief Executive and Education Officers Association
FÁS	Foras Áiseanna Saothair
DES	Department of Education and Science
HSE	Health Services Executive
IVEA	Irish Vocational Educational Association
LES	Local Employment Service
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
VEC	Vocational Educational Committee
WIT	Waterford Institute of Technology
AEGAI	Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors

Programmes/Services

AEGI	Adult Educational Guidance Initiative
AEGS	Adult Educational Guidance Service
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
REGSA	Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

Job Titles

AEO	Adult Education Officer
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EO	Education Officer

For further details, please see: www.citizensinformation.ie

The terms 'client' and 'adult learner' are used as appropriate.

Executive Summary

1. Introduction (see p16-19)

This report is an overarching evaluation of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI)¹ 2000-2006². It is based on a review of existing evaluations, reviews, quarterly returns, annual reports, etc. and statistical data relevant to the research complemented by fieldwork and stakeholder consultations. The Terms of Reference were:

- To evaluate the support and development of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative 2000-2006
- To identify and document models of good practice emerging in the areas of support, development, management and guidance provision
- To make firm recommendations to the Department of Education and Science and other stakeholders and managing agencies on the future development of AEGI to support lifelong learning.

2. Policy Background (see p20-25)

Prior to the establishment of the AEGI there was no unified system of guidance provision for adult learners. Guidance provision tended to be fragmented, duplicated and not accessible to all adults (McNamara³, 1998, p 1). A pilot Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) was established in 2000, in response to *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education (2000)*. It was funded initially over four phases under the National Development Plan 2000-2006 and is now funded under NDP 2007-2013.

3. Management and Operations (see p25-27)

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), an agency of the Department of Education and Science under the aegis of Léargas, coordinates the AEGI. NCGE is the national expert agency in the area of guidance in education and it provides leadership in relation to the integration of quality guidance into education, informed by best national and international policy and practice.

¹ Throughout the report, the guidance service as a whole is referred to as the AEGI. Individual VEC/WIT guidance services are called Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS).

² Data were gathered in 2008, therefore some of the findings refer to a later time period.

³ McNamara, G. (1998). *Guidance in Adult and Continuing Education*. Dublin: National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE).

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative National Centre for Guidance in Education

The AEGI Advisory Group monitors guidance practice and quality and advises the Department of Education and Science on guidance policy. The Advisory Group is chaired by NCGE and contains representatives of all of the target groups, the Department of Education and Science, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, Access Made Accessible (AMA), the Adult Education Officers Association and the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland, the Irish Vocational Education Association, the Education Finance Board, the Partnership Companies, FÁS and IBEC (see Appendix 1 for membership details).

The NCGE also provides advice and technical support to individual Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) and is responsible for centralised planning, induction, training, continuous professional development (CPD), data collection and co-ordinating evaluation. The Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) are responsible for the day-to-day management of AEGS.

As of 2008, there were 40 adult guidance services across the VECs with one service located in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

4. AEGI Objectives and Target Groups (see p27)

The original objectives of the AEGI were:

- To provide adult educational guidance to support participants in adult literacy, VTOS and community education programmes
- To develop and document models of good practice which could be mainstreamed and which could impact on future policy
- To address gaps in the provision of adult educational guidance
- To build local capacity to develop support structures and to encourage local partnerships.
- The three main target groups were:
 - Adult Literacy Programmes
 - Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
 - Adult and Community Education programmes including the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).⁴

⁴ Revised in 2006 to Community Education only, to reflect the wish of the DES to focus on basic education participants only.

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative National Centre for Guidance in Education

In 2006, the remit of the AEGI services was expanded to include the former residents of the designated educational institutions including their spouses, adult children, stepchildren and grandchildren.

5. Main Findings

The main findings from this evaluation are summarised under the appropriate headings below.

5.1 Client Demand and Staffing (see p31-32)

The results indicate that the guidance service is adequately staffed. In 2007, there was approximately one Guidance Counsellor/Coordinator for every 972 VTOS, BTEI and literacy clients.

In 2007, some services (Carlow, Dun Laoghaire, Wicklow, Limerick Co, Galway City, REGSA, Westmeath, Meath, Sligo and Kilkenny) were considerably better staffed than average, and by reference to their target population.

Areas that stand out in terms of relatively low levels of guidance staffing in 2006 and 2007 include Mayo, Cork County, Dublin City, Offaly, Tipperary South and Galway County. All of these areas have ratios in excess of one Guidance Counsellor to over 1500 clients. There may be some scope for guidance staff transfers between VECs/WIT that are geographically close and where considerable staffing disparities exist.

Overall, the ratios of staff to target group populations are in an acceptable range given that not all adults will choose to or need to access the service. The Information Officer also provides an important complementary input, which is not included in these ratio calculations.

5.2 Client Group Targeting (see p33-40)

The extent to which AEGS provide a service to specified target groups varies considerably across services. Large numbers of VTOS students access the guidance service, with some 45% of clients accessing one-to-one guidance. 75% of services reported that at least 50% of VTOS clients accessed one-to-one guidance. The number of literacy students engaging with guidance is very low ranging from 0.5 to about 22% depending on the service, but typically at the lower end of that range. The focus on Community Education clients also varies across services with a significant number of services (7) appearing not to interact strongly with the community sector. BTEI clients also need to be better accessed, as they comprise less than 11% of the caseload of the majority of guidance services (61%). At the other end of the spectrum, the focus on clients 'other' than those in the target groups is arguably too high. Sixteen of the guidance service respondents (over 60%) reported that the over 50% of their clients were in the 'other' category. There is evidence that the barriers potential clients experience in accessing the guidance services can be overcome when concerted efforts to

minimise/overcome them are made by key parties that have day-to-day contact with the target group in question.

5.3 Inward and Outward Referral of Guidance Clients (see p40-41)

The level and type of inward referral to guidance services from other agencies and from the AEGS to other providers varies considerably across locations. There is evidence of exemplary practice in some locations, where well coordinated referral arrangements exist between the AEGS and offices of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, the Local Employment Service (LES), the Probation Service, etc.

The guidance service questionnaire data suggest, however, that referral arrangements are not universally strong. In general, the results indicate that referral arrangements are overly reliant on personalities and relationships locally and need to be rooted more deeply and formally in agreed interagency practice.

5.4 Guidance Delivery and Practice (see p41-43)

It was clear from the services visited as part of the research that guidance services have highly skilled, hardworking and committed persons amongst their staff, some of whom have pioneered approaches to engaging those who find it harder to access education.

There are established services, however, that need to re-prioritise the guidance relationship. In terms of efficiency and service quality, it is important that both the Guidance Coordinator and the Guidance Counsellor remain focused on delivering a guidance service to their main client groups. This research indicates that good practice is where the AEO together with his or her adult education team assumes responsibility for linking the guidance service into onsite and external educational services (see good practice template in Section 5).

There is also scope to improve efficiencies around the use of guidance time in some areas. For example, in rural large geographic areas, Guidance Counsellors spend a considerable amount of their time on the road. There are more efficient ways to reach disparately located clients by making more use of distance learning techniques (in a guidance context), for example.

Most of the AEGS are now well established. In this context, guidance providers and representative bodies identified a need to focus strongly on quality and maintenance of agreed standards. Our view is that at this point in time, an important role for the Advisory Group is to identify areas where more consistency in AEGI service delivery across locations is desirable.

5.5 In-Service Development, Training and NCGE Support (see p43-44)

The feedback from guidance staff and from stakeholders indicates that guidance staff is very well resourced in terms of ongoing support from NCGE, professional

training and external caseload supervision. At this point in time, there probably is scope for reducing the amount of centralised training provision by NCGE. A model where staff is allocated a number of training days per year (3-5) might be worth considering.

5.6 External Evaluation (see p44-45)

An external evaluator was appointed to the AEGI at its inception and attended the Advisory Group for the period 2000-2007. Having access to an independent adult guidance expert with extensive experience of programme implementation was supportive to the Advisory Group and NCGE in particular, and facilitated the development of internal expertise in a consultative and collaborative manner over time.

5.7 Guidance from a VEC/WIT Perspective (see p46)

The CEOs and senior management of the VEC's/WIT made it clear that there is a firm commitment to the guidance service on the basis of consistently positive feedback on the service and strong client demand for the service. In terms of the future development of adult guidance, CEOs and senior management are conscious of the need for stronger integration with other services locally, and particularly literacy services, through collaboration and good relations.

5.8 Guidance from a Client Perspective (see p46-51)

Client feedback was overwhelmingly positive signifying a good quality service overall, delivered personally and professionally while enhancing training provision in the VECs/WIT. All benefited from a mix of group and one-to-one sessions. All of the respondents indicated that the optimum time for a first meeting with a Guidance Counsellor is *prior* to choosing a course. The results suggest that a minimum of one group guidance session and three one-to-one sessions is necessary to fully engage with and support an adult client through their educational journey. This is a broad guideline with the needs of the client determining the level of guidance required.

The fieldwork revealed considerable differences in the kind of guidance service provided across the AEGS. Some services limited guidance to educational choices only, making referrals to FÁS or the LES should more vocational or work oriented explorations be required. Other services had a more holistic orientation based on a view that the type of education clients were engaged in was largely vocational and if guidance addressing job-seeking skills was needed, it should be provided in the context of an already established relationship.

This dovetails with Mc Namara's (1998) finding that there is a need for a '*full guidance service*'. (p29) and that vocational guidance and educational guidance should not be 'divorced'. This issue needs to be explored further by the Advisory Group and clarified with individual services

5.9 Good Practice (see p52-57)

The fieldwork focused on drawing out examples of exemplary practice. Stakeholders drew attention to what they considered good practice and in addition, we examined materials produced by the National Guidance Forum, the National Centre for Guidance in Education, the OECD and others. Based on this combined wisdom we developed a composite picture of good practice in the form of a template presented in Section 5. Good practice is strongly associated with a supportive and involved ethos within the VEC/WIT and strong personal commitment of guidance staff. The model that seemed to work best was one where the guidance staff was clearly part of an adult education *team* led by an AEO who had a strong coordination focus.

5.10 VEC/WIT Location of AEGS – Strengths and Challenges (see p55-56)

This research indicates that the VEC is the most appropriate home for the guidance service, particularly when there is a real commitment to integration as there is in most cases. The advantages include:

- Better coordination and integration of service provision within and between agencies
- Service stability
- Good access to clients
- Strong supportive contribution by the VECs/WIT
- Potential to increase retention, completion and progression rates by enriching learner's decision-making capacity.
- Shared organisational learning across structures and more coherent 'joined up' strategic planning

The challenges include:

- Providing impartial information and guidance on all further and higher educational options for adults
- Ensuring all target groups access guidance equitably
- Ensuring guidance staff do not drift or are not drawn into non guidance activities within the VECs/WIT (ongoing meetings, committees, recruitment activity, teaching etc);

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative National Centre for Guidance in Education

- Ensuring non-VEC/WIT located clients are provided with as good a service as those on site
- Administrative constraints/delays, e.g. length of time to replace guidance staff in large bureaucracies.
- Integrating into an established/different organisational culture

These challenges can be successfully managed as long as all parties are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities.

On a related but separate issue, just one of the guidance services (Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults - REGSA in Waterford city) is located outside the VEC structure at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). This needs to be examined, mindful of the important history of REGSA and the sensitivities that surround any organisational change.

5.11 Overall Management of AEGS (see p56-58)

In terms of overall management of the AEGI, the CEOs and the guidance services consulted reported that they believe that the AEGI national profile needs strengthening. There is an opportunity and a need to clarify and communicate the respective roles of NCGE, AEGI, the Advisory Group and the Department of Education and Science. In terms of communication, one of the suggestions made is that NCGE make an input into the annual conference of the IVEA and other similar gatherings. A revisiting of the service level agreement between DES and VECs/WIT may also be helpful as many services are not familiar with its content.

5.12 Data Gathering and Management (see p58-59)

Considerable amounts of data are gathered by AEGS for local and central purposes. Some of this data is essential for monitoring purposes, some less so. It might be a good point in time to conduct a utility exercise, examining the usefulness of some of this data while also addressing data, analysis and dissemination gaps.

5.13 Mainstreaming and Vision for the Future (see p60-61)

All of those consulted are of the view that the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative is mainstreamed *de facto* if mainstreaming is defined as being 'part and parcel' of adult education provision. Most stakeholders were confident that funding would be continued and that the benefits of guidance had been well demonstrated within the adult education arena.

In most cases, adult educational guidance services have been assimilated into the VEC/WIT system. In some cases, there is evidence of seamless integration between adult and further education services. This is very much dependent on

there already being a seamless approach to adult education within those VECs/WIT.

The vision of the different adult guidance stakeholders including the Department of Education and Science, representative bodies, and NCGE is firmly aligned. All of these parties aspire to the Initiative becoming seamlessly integrated with adult/further educational activity while maintaining a learner centred and non-directive focus. In the longer-term, a number of stakeholders would like to see the adult guidance service made available to all adult learners. Ultimately, the vision of a number of stakeholders is that the guidance service would play a major role in achieving the objectives of the National Skills Strategy by facilitating adult learners to make informed decisions with full awareness of the educational and career opportunities available in a knowledge society.

6. Conclusion and Final Comment (see p62-68)

The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative is successfully established. The results of this research indicate that the AEGI is making a real difference in terms of individual adults' experiences of education and adding value to VEC/WIT programmes and delivery systems. A number of relatively minor changes will ensure that a more balanced client profile across services is developed and that all clients derive maximum benefit from their involvement with adult educational guidance and adult education. These adjustments form the basis of the recommendations made in the next section.

7. Recommendations

This section presents a set of recommendations that arise out of the research conclusions.

7.1 Continuance

The Department of Education and Science should continue to fund the AEGI as part of mainstream adult educational provision.

7.2 Target Group Focus

The Department of Education and Science policy focus on distinct target groups of the AEGI is appropriate and it should be sustained until there is strong evidence that all target groups are accessing guidance in numbers that are proportionate to their size.

7.3 Literacy Target Group

7.3.1 The AEGI Advisory Group (on which NALA is represented) and NALA should jointly plan an agreed approach that ensures all literacy clients receive some level of contact with the AEGS.

7.3.2 NALA and the AEGI Advisory Group should recommend that an introduction to guidance be incorporated into the initial education programme for adult-literacy organisers.

7.3.3 NALA should consider making an awareness raising input at the AEGI annual conference or any other significant guidance training events.

7.3.4 The Department of Education and Science should inform the VECs/WIT and adult literacy organisers (ALOs) that guidance should play a fundamental part in the adult literacy programme. In turn, the adult literacy organisers should adopt a key role in facilitating the introduction and access for students to the AEGS.

7.4 Other Target Groups

7.4.1 AEGS should work closely with the VECs/WIT to improve access for BTEI students in the community where proportional take-up by these clients is not evident.

7.4.2 AEGS should continue to set annual objectives and draw up action plans in collaboration with their AEO/local management and relevant parties to make and maintain contact with all members of the designated target groups in their area.

7.4.3 All AEGS should maximise the use of group guidance approaches to support one-to-one guidance for students. This should, as far as possible, be timetabled into course provision. As a guideline, to facilitate good planning, group guidance should be supported by one-to-one sessions with clients, as appropriate.

7.5 Good Practice & Management of the AEGS

7.5.1 The DES service level agreement should be revisited in order to adapt and streamline AEGI management systems in accordance with strategic priorities.

The respective roles and responsibilities of the Department of Education and Science, NCGE, AEGS and the VECs/WIT need to be clarified and kept under review in respect of management, planning, coordination, information provision, networking and technical support.

7.5.2 On completion of the process outlined in 7.5.1 the Advisory Group should advise on the development of a client service charter and an integrated quality assurance framework for the AEGS. This would have a dual function of streamlining service provision in accordance with agreed good practice and improving the national identity of the AEGI. As part of this process, the Advisory Group could identify areas where more consistency in service delivery is desirable. The feedback from clients gathered during this evaluation provides useful signposts, as do the findings on good practice.

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative National Centre for Guidance in Education

7.5.3 The NCGE, VECs/WIT and the AEGS should examine their systems and processes against the composite model of good practice presented in section 5.3.2. Adjustments should be made, if necessary, to encourage AEGS to fulfill the Department of Education and Science policy goal for adult guidance - namely seamless integration with further education with a strong client-centred and target group focus.

7.5.4 The Advisory Group, in collaboration with relevant parties, should support the development of a protocol for referrals to and from the AEGS i.e. into and from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, community groups, etc. and from AEGS to other guidance, educational, vocational or psychological services. This would prevent unnecessary duplication and guarantee an integrated service for adults.

7.5.5 AEGS and the VECs/WIT should take steps to encourage adults re-entering education to engage with the guidance service prior to finalising course decisions.

7.5.6 The NCGE and the AEGI should make an input into the annual conference of the IVEA, or other equivalent gatherings where senior management of the VECs/WIT can be accessed.

7.5.7 The AEGS should examine ways to make better use of distance learning techniques (in a guidance context), after an initial personal contact has been made with clients. This could include, for example, video conferencing, telephone help lines, on line/email support and so forth.

7.5.8 The advisory group should keep under review ways that the AEGS can continue to provide a comprehensive vocational and educational guidance service to adult learners. Where appropriate, vocationally focused elements, (e.g. CV and interview preparation) and links to other locally available services should be facilitated.

7.5.9 The Department of Education and Science should consider the current membership composition of the Advisory Group to reflect ongoing priorities in lifelong learning. The development of consultations or time/issue specific subcommittees should be continued.

7.5.10 The Department of Education and Science and NCGE, should explore with the VECs/WIT, ways in which the effectiveness of the AEGS can be maximised and duplication of guidance services for adult learners can be avoided.

7.5.11 REGSA, the Waterford AEGS (currently located at the Waterford Institute of Technology), should develop a strategy in consultation with the Department of Education and Science to strengthen their links with Waterford City VEC with a view to enhancing their fit with the national identity of the AEGS and maximising their penetration to all the designated target groups.

7.6 Continuous Professional Development

7.6.1 All Guidance Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors should ensure that they attend regular caseload supervision sessions (to support one-to-one guidance with clients) with an appropriately qualified supervisor.

7.6.2 The Department of Education and Science should recommend to the VECs/WIT that an AEGS training model be adopted whereby staff is allocated a number of in-service training days per annum.

7.6.3 Guidance Coordinators should work with Information Officers to develop the information role, explore opportunities for professional development within the role and ensure the best use of their briefing, information gathering and data analysis skills.

7.7 Data Gathering and Analysis

7.7.1 The Advisory Group/AEGI should examine the data gathered currently in terms of monitoring, evaluation and practice feedback requirements. (See discussion in Section 5.5) Any gaps should be addressed and any data that overlap or do not provide useful and usable information should no longer be gathered. The aim of the exercise should be to streamline the data system with a view to improving data utility.

7.7.2 The AEGI should analyse data (using descriptive statistics, i.e. percentages, means etc) that speak to its objectives (e.g. target group take-up, guidance hours by target group etc) on a regular (quarterly) basis in the form of a short report so that trends can be examined and action taken if necessary. These reports should be presented to the Advisory Group and disseminated to guidance services and the VECs/WIT or made available on NCGE website.

7.7.3 In terms of the database content, the 'other' category should be broken down into significant non-target group categories (employed, asylum seeker etc).

7.7.4 The AEGI should ensure that entry and post guidance destination status information is gathered from all 'pre-entry' guidance clients. This should comprise a follow-up telephone survey of a representative sample of these clients six months to one year after the final guidance interview conducted by the Information Officer.

1. Introduction

This report is an overarching evaluation of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI)⁵ 2000-2006. The research was conducted during 2008 and included some data, where appropriate, post 2006.

The research included a review of existing evaluations, reviews, quarterly returns, annual reports etc., and statistical data relevant to the research supplemented by additional fieldwork and stakeholder consultations.

The Terms of Reference for the research are below.

1.1 Terms of Reference

- To evaluate the support and development of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative 2000-2006
- To identify and document models of good practice emerging in the areas of support, development, management and guidance provision
- To make firm recommendations to the Department of Education and Science and other stakeholders and managing agencies on the future development of AEGI to support lifelong learning.

The desk and field-research objectives include:

- The provision of quantitative data on population and demographic spread of target groups for each county/city serviced by the VECs or WIT at the beginning of 2000 and at the end of 2006 as available;
- The provision of indicators of guidance needs of target groups (including factors such as readiness for guidance, learning supports, referral procedures, community / network links);
- The identification of key elements of adult guidance within the context of AEGI (e.g. what guidance means in adult education: - elements of learning support, career and education path planning, assistance with progression etc);
- The provision of examples of exemplary models of good practice in adult guidance provision for target groups during the period 2000-2006 as documented;
- The identification through field research of additional examples of exemplary models of good practice in adult guidance provision for target groups during the period 2000-2006;

⁵ Throughout the report, the guidance service as a whole is referred to as the AEGI. Individual VEC/WIT guidance services are called Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS).

- The identification of examples of exemplary models of good practice in support, development and management systems for AEGI from 2000-2006 (VEC/WIT, NCGE, AEGI National Advisory Group, External Evaluators);
- Identification for all stakeholders of areas for further development of AEGI in terms of support, development and management structures.

1.2 Structure of the Report

Section 1 contains the Introduction and the Terms of Reference for the Evaluation. The methodology is outlined in Section 2. In Section 3, a backdrop to the main guidance policy developments in Ireland and in Europe is provided and a description of the Irish guidance infrastructure and the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI).

The analysis of all sources of stakeholder feedback (Advisory Group members, guidance clients, guidance services and VECs/WIT) drawing together common themes with a particular focus on targeting and good practice is presented in Section 4. In Section 5, good practice is discussed.

The conclusions and recommendations are presented in Sections 6 and 7.

2. Methodology

This evaluation comprised desk research and fieldwork strands. The desk research strand incorporated an examination of all the evaluation reports and reviews conducted over the period 2000-2006 together with relevant policy and procedural documentation on the Initiative. We also examined data base returns and analysed supply and demand trends with reference to the Small Area Statistics produced by the Central Statistics Office. The fieldwork strand comprised a series of site-based interviews, surveys of clients and practitioners and consultations with all main stakeholders including the external evaluator. The various research activities are described below.

2.1 Field Research

Eight guidance services were identified for on site consultations on the basis of a random geographically stratified selection procedure. The selected services were asked to provide access to guidance participants for focus group sessions and to set up meetings with all guidance and information relevant personnel and the Adult Education Officers (AEOs) or their equivalent within the VEC/WIT.

A structured interview guide was designed in consultation with the Steering Group to explore guidance practice and delivery, management and coordination, client management, training and support and mainstreaming with guidance staff and AEOs.

2.2 Participant Feedback

A participant questionnaire and focus group schedule were also designed and were used to gather feedback on the quality and impact of their guidance experiences. Questionnaire data were gathered by telephone, one-to-one interview or group format depending on literacy levels and local arrangements. Focus group sessions were structured around the themes of:

- Effective guidance,
- Barriers to guidance,
- Strengths and weaknesses of the guidance service locally,
- Forms of guidance that are most helpful to adult learners,
- Advantages and disadvantages of locating AEGS in the VEC/WIT,
- How participants would like to see their local adult guidance service develop in the future.

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative National Centre for Guidance in Education

Over 100 participants from the eight case study sites were consulted over the course of the evaluation. The clients consulted were representative of the main target groups (VTOS, literacy, and community sectors). Almost all of those consulted had a strong engagement with their particular guidance service and were in a good position to comment about the effects of guidance for adults in or considering a return to education.

2.3 Guidance Service Feedback

A detailed questionnaire on guidance practice was designed in consultation with the Steering Group. All Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) set up prior to the end of 2006 were invited to complete this questionnaire as part of the overarching research. Twenty-nine services returned completed questionnaires yielding a response rate of 80%.

The questionnaire contained items on:

- Client profiles
- Good practice
- Leadership and Professional Development
- Service Integration and Referral
- Service Gaps
- Future of the Service

The high response rate, coupled with the strength and consistency of themes emerging, means that the findings can be regarded with confidence.

2.4 VEC/WIT Consultation

A consultation was held with the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Education Officers (EOs) of the VECs as part of their annual conference. The purpose of this consultation was to inform the Chief Executive and Education Officers Association (CEEEOA) of the research and to gather their feedback and experiences of hosting the guidance services to date. The topics covered included:

- Impact of the AEGI
- Examples of Good Practice
- Role of the VEC/WIT in the AEGI
- Future of the AEGI

Over 35 senior managers attended the consultation and the discussion was participative with many points raised and questions asked. The themes that emerged were consistent with those from other stakeholder input.

2.5 Data Analysis

The information gathered from the stakeholder interviews, focus groups and questionnaires together with evidence from the prior evaluation reports and the site visits fed into a meta-analytic assessment of the extent to which the Adult Educational Guidance Service is achieving its objectives. Given that the number of services is small for statistical analysis purposes (less than 50), most of the analysis is qualitative, based on emergent themes. There is a good degree of consensus amongst the services, service users and stakeholder organisations on most issues. Hence, there can be confidence in the findings and the recommendations drawn.

3. Guidance Policy Developments

This section examines the rationale for adult guidance and provides a brief overview of guidance provision in the EU and in Ireland. The Irish guidance infrastructure is described with a particular focus on the AEGI.

3.1 Rationale for Lifelong Guidance

The potential for guidance to help governments achieve social equity goals is recognised by the EU, the OECD and the Irish Department of Education and Science.

In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council set out its aspiration for the European Union to become:

‘The most competitive and dynamic knowledge based society in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’ (Communication on Lifelong Learning, 2000).

Guidance was seen as playing a direct role in the achievement of this goal as can be gleaned from the Draft Resolution (which was subsequently adopted, see 3.2.3) of the European Council and of the representatives of the Member States which states that:

‘High quality guidance provision throughout life is a key component of education, training and employability strategies to attain the strategic goal of Europe becoming the world’s most dynamic knowledge based society by 2010’.⁶

Policy makers have identified guidance counselling as playing a key role in the realisation of life-long learning policy goals. The concept of a job for life is no longer viable. The emphasis now is on employability, adaptability and access to learning throughout the life span so that core skills are updated and enhanced in keeping with the changing skills needs of dynamic, knowledge based economies. By implication, individual citizens need to have access to relevant labour market information, guidance and counselling throughout the lifespan to help them make choices about learning and work and to help balance their own needs with those of the economy.

Numerous studies show that a person’s initial education is strongly and positively associated with participation in education later in life (see for example De Broucker 1997⁷; OECD 1999; OECD 2003a⁸; Peters 2004⁹).

⁶ The Draft Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the Field of Guidance Throughout Life in Europe (May 2004)

⁷ De Broucker, Patrice. (1997) Job related Education and Training, Who has Access? *Education Quarterly Review*. Vol. 4, no. 1.

⁸ OECD (2003a) *Transforming Disability into Ability: Policies to Promote Work and Income*

This and other evidence suggests that disadvantaged adults find it difficult to access lifelong learning opportunities and that adults in general need good access to pre-entry guidance. There are also indications that demand for guidance services is significantly stronger than supply (OECD, 2004¹⁰).

Guidance plays an important policy role in helping achieve social equality goals. An EU wide survey (Leonardo De Vinci Programme, 2000¹¹) found that guidance is a key element in policies preventing social exclusion and a major asset for the enhancement of equal opportunities in the field of employment.

In its country note on Ireland (2002)¹², the OECD prioritised the need to provide guidance access for adults who are in transition into employment and between employment and learning. It also emphasised the importance of providing pre-entry guidance counselling to adults not attached to particular forms of learning provision.

The OECD noted that across OECD countries, guidance services for adults are largely concentrated in public employment services and the adult education sector (OECD 2004. *op. cit.*). Within these sectors, the OECD highlighted important guidance challenges. In the public employment arena, guidance services are often '*self service in nature with limited personal support*'. It also cautioned that in the adult education sector the close links between the educational institution and the guidance service hosted by it can make it difficult to provide impartial information and advice.

These challenges are relevant to the AEGI, and emerged as important themes during the fieldwork. Before discussing guidance issues further, guidance developments at EU level and the evolution of the Irish adult guidance service are described.

3.2 Guidance Developments in the EU

At European level, a number of policy papers and handbooks on guidance were produced in recent years. The EU policy interest in guidance has also led to the establishment of an expert group on lifelong guidance, and a survey of guidance policies in 29 European countries. Short descriptions of these developments are provided over:

Security for Disabled People. Paris.

⁹ Peters, M.A. (2004) Education and the Learning Citizen in European Democracy. *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* 194(4):pp. 93-102.

¹⁰ OECD (2004) *Career Guidance And Public Policy: Bridging The Gap*. OECD, Paris.

¹¹ Leonardo De Vinci Programme (2000) *Survey on Adult (Wage-earners and Job-Seekers) Vocational Practices in Europe*. EU Commission.

¹² OECD (2002) *Review of Career Guidance Policies: Country Note Ireland*. OECD, Paris.

3.2.1 Lifelong Guidance Expert Group

The European Commission established a Lifelong Guidance Expert Group in 2002 to support guidance policy development. The Expert Group consists of 26 members including officials from education and labour ministries, representatives from the European social partners, consumer, parents, and youth associations, and from European and international bodies. The main output from the Expert Group is the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, which held its inaugural meeting in March 2007. Twenty-three European countries participated and agreed to support the Network as members or observers. It is important to point out that the view of the Expert Group is that it is essential that there is broad European participation in the Network and that its work should be Member State driven and build on a national institutional framework involving appropriate ministry's and other relevant parties.

3.2.2 Career Guidance Handbook

In 2004, the OECD and the European Commission jointly published Career Guidance A Handbook for Policy Makers. The handbook is based on international reviews of policies for career guidance undertaken by the OECD, by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, by the European Training Foundation, and by the World Bank.

It sets out the following pointers for policy makers in education, training and employment settings:

- Challenges that they face in making sure that career guidance services can meet public policy goals;
- Questions that they need to ask themselves in responding to these challenges;
- Some of the options that are open to them for the delivery of career guidance within a lifelong learning and active employability framework; and
- Some examples of effective responses, drawn from OECD and European Union countries.

The handbook covers four broad policy themes: improving guidance for young people and for adults; broadening access to services and strengthening the systems that support guidance. It provides examples of good practice in guidance provision and a set of tools to help Member States to improve and modernise their guidance policies and systems.

3.2.3 The Euroguidance Network

The EU supports the Euroguidance Network, which aims to promote mobility and to develop the European dimension in guidance. There are Euroguidance centres in all the EU/EEA and pre-accession countries, and also in Switzerland. The Irish Euroguidance centres are located in NCGE and in FÁS.

3.2.4 Review of Guidance Services

In 2002, CEDEFOP and the European Training Foundation (ETF) extended the review of guidance services conducted by the OECD to twenty-nine European countries. Individual country experts provided reports on different aspects of guidance provision, and the findings were subsequently analysed across countries in terms of significant guidance developments, trends, challenges and issues, together with strengths and weaknesses of information and guidance systems and policies across the countries surveyed.

In 2004, CEDEFOP produced a synthesis of results of the country reviews and a short paper comparing and contrasting the guidance policy situation in Europe with that of middle-income countries and non-European developed countries.

The findings indicate that while career¹³ guidance is seen as increasingly important by European governments, and particularly in respect of its potential for achieving lifelong learning policy goals, there are a number of serious weaknesses that need to be addressed. These include:

- Access to guidance services tends to be limited to students and the unemployed.
- The focus tends to be on immediate decisions, without taking into account lifelong learning and career development.
- Training for service providers tends to be limited and inappropriate, given the range of client needs that have to be catered for.
- There is often a lack of cross-sectoral collaboration between different ministries, and with stakeholders.
- The evidence base on guidance inputs, impacts and results is too weak to provide policy makers with useful data on outcomes, costs and benefits.

¹³ In Ireland the term 'guidance' is preferred over 'career guidance' as it reflects the broader, more holistic approach taken. The Department of Education and Science sees 'educational guidance' as encompassing guidance and non-specialised counselling (see White Paper Learning for Life, *op cit*).

- Few European countries have developed a coherent system of guidance services that cater for the needs of the citizen in a holistic manner, and which targets career-related concerns across the life cycle.
- With career guidance taking increasingly varied and disparate forms, there is a need within countries for stronger mechanisms to articulate a vision and develop a strategy for delivering services more effectively.

3.2.5 EU Resolution on Guidance

In May 2004, a significant EU document regarding lifelong guidance was issued when the EU Council of Education Ministers adopted a *Resolution on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe*.

The need for this resolution was signaled by the reviews of guidance policies detailed in 3.2.4. These studies showed that policies, systems and practices for guidance in many European countries did not match the requirements of knowledge-based economies signaling the need for a reform of guidance policies and a rethinking of guidance practice.

The Council Resolution on Lifelong Guidance 2004 recognises the key policy role of guidance in preventing social exclusion and maximising the effectiveness, efficiency and positive impact of education including:

- Supporting early prevention strategies capable of significantly reducing mismatches between education and training and the needs of the labour market,
- Increasing completion rates in secondary and higher education and facilitating the transition to work, as well as return to studies,
- Facilitating occupational and geographical mobility of learners and workers,
- Improving the quality and provision of learning provided by educational institutions.

In response, European governments have agreed to improve the quality of guidance policy, systems and provision with a view to encouraging life long access. Ireland had already started on this path, as early as 2000, as will be elaborated in the next section below.

3.3 Guidance Infrastructure in Ireland

Guidance service infrastructure in Ireland is essentially dualistic in form with different services provided under the education and training systems respectively.

The National Centre for Guidance in Education is an agency of the Department of Education and Science. Its main roles are to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education and to inform the policy of the Department in the field of guidance. It also provides specialised support to relevant organisations, agencies, and guidance practitioners in the primary, post primary, non-formal, third level and adult education sectors (see www.ncge.ie).

Outside of the education sector, Foras Áiseanna Saothair, Training & Employment Authority (FÁS) and the LES, through their employment placement and training services, is involved in providing guidance services to its primary client groups namely adult job seekers, people with disabilities, early school leavers and apprentices. The FÁS guidance service is not restricted to these groups; any adult, including adults in employment, can book an interview with a FÁS employment support officer or a mediator in the Local Employment Service (LES). In practice however, FÁS guidance services tend not to be accessed by adults who are not in its core client groups. As the OECD¹⁴ (2002) pointed out, adults in Ireland and in other OECD countries tend to be reluctant to use guidance services associated with public employment services.

There was no unified system of guidance provision for adult learners before the AEGI was established. Guidance provision tended to be fragmented, duplicated and not accessible to all adults (McNamara¹⁵, 1998, p 1).

In 1998, NCGE identified the need for adult guidance services in Ireland and the shape those services might take in the report *Guidance in Adult and Continuing Education*. This report informed the Green Paper on Adult Education (DES 1998).

3.4 Description of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative

Prior to the establishment of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) guidance provision for adults was poorly resourced and often delivered by trainers/tutors and others who had no formal guidance qualifications:

'Delivery is via many providers, described largely as 'enthusiastic amateurs'. Provision is fragmented, of inconsistent quality and there is a great deal of competition among providers' (Keogh p. 24, cited in McNamara op. cit.).

The need for a more structured, professional approach to adult guidance provision was recognised by the Department of Education and Science (DES) and a pilot Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) was established in 2000, in response to *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education (2000)*. It was funded initially over four phases under the National Development Plan

¹⁴ OECD (2002) *Review of Career Guidance Policies: Country Note Ireland*. OECD, Paris.

¹⁵ McNamara, G. (1998). *Guidance in Adult and Continuing Education*. Dublin: National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE).

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative
National Centre for Guidance in Education

2000-2006 and is now funded under the NDP 2007-2013. The *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education* set out proposals for the development of an adult educational guidance service to support participants in VTOS, adult literacy and adult and community education programmes.

3.4.1 Management and Coordination of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education and Science under the aegis of Léargas, established to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education. It is the national expert agency in the area of guidance in education and it provides leadership in relation to the integration of quality guidance into education, informed by best national and international policy and practice.

In recognition of its guidance remit, it was given a lead role in co-ordinating and supporting the AEGI from the outset. A section of the NCGE acts as technical support to the adult guidance services and is responsible for centralised training needs identification, data collection, aggregation and distribution to members of the Advisory Group.

The Advisory Group is chaired by NCGE and contains representatives of all of the target groups, the Department of Education and Science, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, the IVEA, the Education Finance Board, the local area-based Partnership Companies, FÁS, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), Access Made Accessible (AMA), the Adult Education Officers Association and the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (for full list of members see Appendix 1). The Advisory Group monitors guidance practice and quality and advises the Department of Education and Science on guidance policy.

The remit of the AEGI National Advisory Group 2007-2013 is outlined in the Department of Education and Science (DES) Terms of Reference as follows:

- To advise on continued development and management of the Adult Educational Guidance Service with reference to managing organisations and designated target groups;
- To build on the experience and to continue to support the development of models of good practice for provision of guidance to hard to reach groups;
- To advise on the implementation of an internal quality assurance and self-evaluation process for the AEGS;
- To review and evaluate relevant AEGI reports;

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative National Centre for Guidance in Education

- To consider how best practice outcomes can inform policy, practice and evolution of service;
- To explore possibilities for future development;
- To identify policy issues emerging and make recommendations to the Department of Education and Science.

The vision of the AEGI is of a guidance service that is client led, and which accrues social and economic benefits:

‘Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society’¹⁶

The AEGI understanding of guidance is informed by ‘Learning for Life, White Paper on Adult Education’¹⁷ wherein ‘guidance’ refers to a range of activities designed to assist people to make appropriate learning choices.

In the context of adult education these activities include: information; assessment; advice; counselling; teaching/careers education; placement; advocacy; feedback; follow-up; networking; managing and innovating systems change.

In terms of the future, the agreed framework for the AEGI from 2007–2013 comprises an integrated model of adult educational guidance, which is:

- Inclusive of the pre-entry, entry, ongoing and pre-exit stages
- Inclusive of personal, educational and vocational guidance
- Working in partnership at local level, meeting a spectrum of guidance needs of the target groups, employing a range of methodologies including information provision, one-to-one guidance, group guidance and outreach provision
- Under the social inclusion priority as outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013;
- Based within the VECs/other managing providers;

The VECs and WIT are responsible for local management and their role in this regard is outlined in the service level agreement as described in Section 3.4.3

¹⁶ National Guidance Forum (2007) *Guidance for Life An Integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland*. National Guidance Forum, Dublin.

¹⁷ Department of Education and Science (2000) *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*¹⁷ DES, Dublin.

and in the Circulars that superseded the agreement. (see Appendix 3).

3.4.2 AEGI Objectives and Target Groups

As noted, the AEGI was established on a pilot basis initially in 2000. For each of the four phases applications for funding were invited from ‘statutory and voluntary bodies with a capacity to deliver an adult educational guidance service¹⁸’.

The objectives set out for the AEGI were:

- To provide adult educational guidance to support participants in adult literacy, VTOS and community education programmes,
- To develop and document models of good practice which could be mainstreamed and which could impact on future policy,
- To address gaps in the provision of adult educational guidance,
- To build local capacity to develop support structures and to encourage local partnerships.

The three main target groups were:

- Adult Literacy Programmes
- Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
- Adult and Community Education programmes including the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).¹⁹

In 2006, the remit of the AEGI services was expanded to include the former residents of designated educational institutions including their spouses, adult children, stepchildren and grandchildren. All of these clients are also eligible to apply for funding from and be referred by the AEGI service to the Education Finance Board.

The BTEI is intended to make further education provision more accessible generally. However, a priority is to target the individuals and groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation, and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process. Therefore high priority is given to increasing participation by individuals from the following groups: adults and young early school leavers who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels; the long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long

¹⁸ Ref: Guidelines for Applicants, NCGE

¹⁹ Revised in 2006 to Community Education only, to reflect the wish of the DES to focus on basic education participants only.

term unemployed, especially those in the older age groups; those not in work but not eligible to be on the Live Register; those in the workplace with basic skills needs; disadvantaged women who have particular experience of barriers to participation; disadvantaged men, including those experiencing rural isolation; lone parents and others with caring responsibilities that may prohibit their participation in full time courses; members of the Traveller community; homeless people; drug users; ex-offenders; people with disabilities; and people for whom English is not the mother tongue, who require literacy and language supports²⁰.

Impartial Adult Education information on local, regional and national adult education was also to be made available to the general public, but only those within the target groups were deemed eligible for one-to-one guidance meetings.

3.4.3 Service Level Agreement

Up to 2006, each pilot project worked to a standard Terms of Service Agreement delivering an adult guidance service to clients from the specified target groups within some or all of the geographical area under the remit of the service provider. The service level agreement set out the terms of funding for VECs/WIT, which required contractors to:

- Provide staff for the service with the required qualifications, whose responsibilities are in line with the job profiles specified by the National Centre for Guidance in Education
- Provide information and guidance related services aimed at the identified target groups, with an agreed case load of clients using the services, and show evidence that the service is being used adequately by the client groups
- Provide outreach/visiting guidance related services to all adult literacy, VTOS and adult and community education groups in the areas specified in the proposal
- Complete and submit timely and accurate quarterly reports to NCGE in the format specified
- Maintain and provide reliable and accurate records for the projects, including financial records and quantitative indicators in the format specified, and maintain local records of client case interaction
- Provide agreed support and supervision of pilot project staff, including

²⁰ Department of Education and Science (2002). *Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Part-time Programmes, Guidelines for the Formal Strand*. Circular Letter. DES.

management support, and regular team appraisal and review

- Provide essential accommodation and resources for both clients and staff, including venues for confidential meetings with clients, access to ICT and to any required diagnostic tools
- Develop necessary network procedures with relevant organisations and agencies
- Disseminate and share examples of good practice in projects
- Comply with the evaluation process and procedures agreed by the Advisory Group/National Centre for Guidance in Education
- Publicise the role of the National Development Plan in supporting the measure, including in any brochures, publicity, advertisements and public events concerning the measure.

By the end of 2006, the Department of Education and Science had funded 38 guidance services in areas where formal guidance services had not been available hitherto. Guidance was provided by way of information, one-to-one sessions, and group work and outreach services to centres in the community.

The service level agreement was superseded by two Department of Education and Science Circulars that laid out the roles of educational guidance and information staff in detail. (see Appendix 3).

3.4.4 Guidance Staffing and Roles

As of 2008, there are 40 adult educational guidance services across the VECs with one service located in the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The staffing arrangement originally envisaged was for each service to have a staffing complement of a Guidance Counsellor and an Information Officer. Circular 70/04 clarified the role of the Guidance Counsellor with additional duties of the Co-ordinator. The Guidance Coordinator/ Counsellor was one person, until extra funding was available to services in 2007²¹ to take on additional Guidance Counsellors who did not have co-ordination duties.

The staffing numbers for each of the services are discussed in Section 4.

Guidance Coordinators are employed as Guidance Counsellors in the first instance but with an additional coordination function that is focused on coordinating the guidance unit and conducting the brokerage and networking necessary to access guidance clients.

²¹ The expansion of staffing in 2007 was based on specific criteria

Guidance Counsellors are employed to work with the target groups individually or as groups. The Information Officer has a wider brief; to provide administrative support to the Adult Educational Guidance Service and to provide information on adult education to all adults that access the service. In many services Information Officers arrange one-to-one interviews where appropriate with the Guidance Counsellor for clients that fall within the target groups (for further details, see Appendix 3).

4. Guidance Service Operations

This section presents the results of the analysis of **all** stakeholder input (Advisory Group members, guidance clients, guidance services and VECs/WIT) drawing together common themes with a particular focus on targeting and good practice. The balance between supply of and demand for guidance services is discussed first.

4.1 Client Demand for and Supply of Guidance Services

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) Small Area Statistics from the 2006 Census can be used as proxies to determine the potential level of guidance demand by VEC/WIT area. The most appropriate statistic for analysis of potential guidance demand purposes is the level of adults with a history of early school leaving (see Table 1, page 20 and Table 3, Appendix 2, page 62 for more detail.)

Table 3 in Appendix 2 (page 62) shows the breakdown of the adult (over 15 year old) population by VEC area, the age education ceased (by VEC area), levels of unemployment and the implied levels of adult disadvantage within these areas.

The following trends can be seen:

- The highest population of adults by VEC areas²² live in Dublin city (13%) followed by Cork county (8.3%), South Dublin (6%), Fingal (5.5%), Dun Laoghaire (5%) and Kildare 4.2%.
- Early school leaving (adults over 15 who left school at 16 or younger) ranges from lows of 13-14% of adults in Galway and Dun Laoghaire to 30% and over of the VEC populations of Donegal (39%), Cavan (31%), Louth (31%), Limerick (31%) and Leitrim (30%).
- Unemployment rates are correspondingly high in many of these VEC areas ranging from a high of 6.8% in Limerick followed by Waterford (6.5%) Donegal (6.3%), Longford (5.9%), Louth (5.9%) and Dublin city (5.7%).
- Ratios of guidance staff to adults who left school early (at 16 or younger) in 2006 vary greatly across areas. They range from 1:3,570 in Waterford to 1:65,713 in Cork County.

²² Please note that AEGS do not work with VTOS clients in the CDVEC areas. VTOS clients have access to the Colleges of Further Education Guidance Counsellors instead. The CDVEC AEGI services focus on providing guidance to other relevant client groups in the community.

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative
National Centre for Guidance in Education

In terms of potential demand for guidance services, the number of adults who completed their education at age 16 or younger and without formal qualifications in each area, referenced to guidance provision, is a useful reference point, and is a relevant input to funding decisions. However, it should be noted that the numbers of early school leavers in each VEC location do not necessarily correlate with the numbers in the target groups in each location. Obviously, people sometimes travel further afield to attend courses and adult educational resources and awareness of them may vary from place to place. Having said that, on a population basis alone, the services at the bottom of the Table 1 below have a larger potential pool to work with. Some of these services also cover large geographical areas with highly dispersed populations. In many cases, the demand suggested by levels of adult early school leavers (i.e. those who left school early without formal qualifications) translates into larger target groups as is discussed below.

TABLE 1				
RATIO OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS/COORDINATORS TO NUMBER OF ADULT EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS IN VEC AREAS, 2006				
Ratio 1<5,000 Early school Leavers	Ratio 1>5,001<7,000	Ratio 1>7001<9000	Ratio 1>9001 <10,000	Ratio 1>10,001 <12000
Galway City	Carlow	Longford	Clare	Donegal
REGSA Waterford (WIT)	Limerick City		Dublin S&W	Wicklow
Sligo				Dun Laoghaire
RATIO OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS/COORDINATORS TO NUMBER OF ADULT EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS IN VEC AREAS 2006				
Ratio 1>12,001<14000	Ratio 1>14001<16,000	1>16001 <20000	1>20,001 < 30,000	1: Over 30,000
Galway Co	Dublin City	Co Galway	Limerick Co	Cork Co
Kilkenny	Mayo	Fingal		Meath
Cork City	Kildare	Tipperary South		Wexford
Tipperary North	Monaghan	Offaly		
Laois	Westmeath	Donegal		
Roscommon				

4.2 Target Group Size and Guidance Coverage

Table 2 below shows the total number of VTOS, Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and adult literacy clients by VEC area in 2006 (the latest year for which a full set of figures are available). The data were sourced from the Department of Education and Science and VTOS directly. The totals in each area were divided by the number of Guidance Counsellors in that area to provide a ratio of coverage in each VEC/WIT area.

Geographical Area	VTOS N (2006)	BTEI 2006	Adult Literacy	Guidance Counsellor/ Coordinators	Ratio 2006 ²³
Carlow	34	241	396	1.5*	1:447*
Cavan	0	181	1,189	1	1:1,370
Clare	151	934	1,830	2*,	1:1,457*
Cork City	0	762	1,963	2*	1:1362*
Cork Co	76	2,214	1,214	1*	1:3,504*
Donegal	176	719	3,189	3*	1:1,361*
Dublin City	569	1,615	7,087	5.5	1:1,685
Dublin Co**	272	2,317	2,911	4**	1:1,375
Dun Laoghaire	0	265	763	1.5*	
Galway City	177	195	773	2	1:572
Galway Co	96	1,130	1,038	1.5	1:1,509
Kerry	151	939	1,451	2	1:847
Kildare	261	538	1,438	2	1:1,118*
Kilkenny	106	533	851	1.5*	1:993*
Laois	87	307	554	1	1:948
Leitrim	40	266	364	n/a	
Limerick City	189	558	728	1.5*	1:983*
Limerick Co	48	120	506	1	1:674
Longford	26	476	936	1*	1:1,438*
Louth	98	344	1,179	n/a	
Mayo	133	969	1,320	1	1:2,422
Meath	34	216	610	1*	1:860*
Monaghan	0	475	1,274	1*	1:1,749*
Offaly	33	862	762	1	1:1,657
Roscommon	70	256	536	1	1:862
Sligo	46	580	984	1.5*	1:1,073
Tipperary Sth	46	570	481	1	1:1,610
WIT	173	550	519	2	1:621
Waterford Co	77	172	1,193	n/a	
Westmeath	80	391	948	2	1:709
Wexford	186	476	446	1	1:1,108
Wicklow	268	653	834	2	1:585
Total ²⁴	3,550	20,765	37,942	49.5	1:1,257

**Includes Fingal, Tallaght, Lucan, Clondalkin, Dundrum-Shankill.

²³ Not including community education as no figures available

* Additional Guidance Counsellor(s) allocated for 2007

²⁴ Excluding those centres that had no guidance staff in 2006

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative National Centre for Guidance in Education

This table must be viewed as indicative, as numbers for the community education target group are not available. According to the database, 5,000 community education participants were seen by the guidance service on a one-to-one basis in 2006, hence the target population is a multiple of this number. Some of this target group included BTEI students who were not counted separately from community education clients until 2007 following its expansion. It also important to note that adult literacy clients are not accessing guidance services in anything like the levels suggested by the size of the adult literacy population. Hence, the ratios in the Table above are probably not far off actual patterns on the ground.

The results indicate that the guidance service is adequately staffed. In 2006, there was one Guidance Coordinator/Counsellor for an average of 1,257 VTOS, BTEI and, literacy students across the VECs/WIT and, in addition, one Information Officer for most services. In 2007, an additional twelve Guidance Counselors/Coordinators were appointed bringing the average ratio down further to approximately one Guidance Counsellor/Coordinator for every 1,012 VTOS, BTEI and literacy clients.

Taking those additional staff into account for 2007, some services (Carlow, Dun Laoghaire, Wicklow, Limerick Co, Galway City, REGSA, Westmeath, Meath, Sligo and Kilkenny) are considerably better staffed than average, and by reference to their target population.

Areas that stand out in terms of geographical coverage and relatively low levels of guidance staffing in 2006 and 2007 include Mayo, Cork County, Dublin City, Offaly, Tipperary South and Galway County. All of these areas have ratios in excess of one Guidance Counsellor to over 1500 clients. In addition, Cork County, which had the lowest level of staffing of all the centres in 2006, has to provide a service over a large geographic area. There may be some scope for guidance staff transfers between VECs/WIT that are geographically close and where considerable staffing disparities exist for example, between Dun Laoghaire and Dublin City, or Galway City and Galway County or Kilkenny and Tipperary South or Offaly.

Overall, however, the ratios of staff to target group populations are in an acceptable range given that not all adults will choose to or need to access the service. The Information Officer also provides an important complementary input to service provision, which is not included in these ratio calculations.

4.3 Target Group Boundaries and Coverage

Most stakeholders have the view that the target groups that have been selected are appropriate and that the service should focus on their needs exclusively. A small number of parties would like to see guidance services offered to all adults in the population.

There are grey areas within the target group categories, however. Most AEGS provide a service to those they deem 'pre-entry,' which is in keeping with what was envisaged by the White Paper. However, at present it is not possible to track the extent to which 'pre-entry' clients follow through into further education as these clients are contained within the large 'other' category on the data base and follow up/progression data is not gathered

A number of AEGS provide guidance to all 'drop in' clients, whether in a target group or not, on the basis that they do not want to refuse people a service. The number of 'drop in' clients is significant across services, with almost half the survey respondents (45.5%) reporting drop in rates of over 21%.

The pattern of working with adults outside the specified target groups seems to be predicated by resources. Some AEGS have the staffing capacity to provide a full guidance service to the wider adult population²⁵ (i.e. non target group people who are classified as 'other' by the services) and some only have the capacity to work with a fraction of the target group population and have opted to prioritise one or two groups (adult literacy and community education, for example) so that they can provide a quality service to them. Services that are specifically focused on adult literacy clients have been more successful in generating a demand from literacy clients than those who have not developed particular strategies to increase the uptake of guidance by literacy students. In instances where the target group population is relatively small there seems to be more drift from the target groups into providing a service to the more general population.

²⁵ For example Carlow, Galway city, Regsa WIT – See Table 2.

4.4 Target Group Penetration

The issue of target group penetration – i.e. the extent to which AEGS provide a service to specified target groups is an important concern. Looking at the survey statistics and data base statistics there is considerable variation across services:

Reported Service level to each of the dedicated client groups Across Services (Source: Questionnaire Analysis]

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| ▪ Literacy ²⁶ | 0.5% to 22% |
| ▪ VTOS | 6% to 60% |
| ▪ BTEI | 0% to 40% |
| ▪ Com Ed | 5% to 68% |
| ▪ Other | 5% to 68% |

4.4.1 VTOS

Large numbers of VTOS students access the guidance service, with some 45% of clients accessing one-to-one guidance (as indicated by database returns). The broad range reported by services is somewhat skewed by centres that have little or no VTOS activity. Seventy five percent of services reported that at least 50% of VTOS clients accessed one-to-one guidance. VTOS clients benefit by virtue of being easier to access and from the practice of scheduled group guidance sessions.

4.4.2 BTEI

BTEI figures are estimated from the returns by service providers for this evaluation only, as they were not counted separately for the database until 2007. On the basis of these figures it seems that BTEI clients comprise less than 11% of the caseload of the majority (69%) of guidance services. However, the BTEI population is over five times the size of the VTOS population, indicating that BTEI clients should form a much higher proportion of typical caseloads. The BTEI target group is disparate in the sense that a wide variety of eligible individuals, alongside others, are funded to attend part-time courses in a broad range of educational settings including Senior Traveller Education Centres, VEC's/WIT, schools, third level access programmes, etc. In some locations, guidance services have linked in with the Probation Service, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and Senior Traveller Education Centres to coordinate contact with BTEI clients. These approaches are effective in generating clients and building good working relationships.

²⁶ Excluding outliers, i.e. services that focus exclusively on adult literacy like Dublin City and others

4.4.3 Community Education

The focus on Community Education clients varies across services but comprises over 50% of the client base for the majority of services (18 of 29 respondents). A significant number of services (7) appear not to have a lot of interaction with the community sector, as indicated by community clients comprising less than 10% of their caseload

4.4.4 Adult Literacy

The number of literacy students accessing the guidance service is very low ranging from 0.5 to about 22% depending on the service, but typically at the lower end of that range. To underline this further (by referencing database returns), in terms of overall penetration of the literacy target group which comprises over 37,000 individuals, just under 3% of literacy target group accessed the guidance service in 2006. Uptake by VTOS clients is dramatically higher (45%). VTOS is, of course, a much smaller target group (3,700 approx) and also much easier with which to make contact. VTOS clients also had more guidance in terms of contact hours (average of 2.17 one-to-one sessions) than their literacy peers (average of 1.7 one-to-one sessions).

The AEGS and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) recognise that more needs to be done to ensure literacy clients access guidance services in a more proportionate manner. Stakeholders consistently identified a number of barriers. These include:

- The logistics of making contact with literacy clients who typically meet with tutors individually for two hours per week.
- Perceived boundary issues heightened by the exclusive and confidential nature of the literacy tutoring relationship.
- Perception that Guidance Counsellors and other parties have different understandings and expectations of 'progression' for literacy clients
- Perception that literacy tutors do not fully understand the role of guidance and particularly its non-directive nature.
- Perception that many literacy clients are 'not ready' for guidance.

There is evidence of these challenges being overcome when concerted efforts are made by the guidance service and literacy services jointly. Dublin Inner City Adult Guidance Service (CDVEC) focuses almost exclusively on literacy clients and has made progress accessing literacy clients, after experiencing initial resistance. Considerable efforts went into relationship building at planning and delivery levels. Feedback from literacy clients was extremely positive and indicates a need for guidance and considerable benefits from the service. The impacts of guidance reported by literacy clients included:

- Progression into Intensive Literacy for Adults course
- Access to grants and other supports
- Referral and diagnosis of dyslexia
- Return to education
- Increased self belief and self confidence
- Increased awareness of educational and other progression options

Other suggestions made include introducing a briefing session on guidance into the literacy tutors initial and continuous professional development training, and setting up a two way consultation between the literacy and guidance services so that relationships may be built and any concerns can be aired, understood and addressed.

4.4.5 Other Clients

At the other end of the spectrum, the focus on clients 'other' than those in the target groups is arguably too high. Sixteen of the guidance service respondents (over 60%) reported that over 50% of their clients were in the 'other' category. Considerable variability across services was evident with regard to providing guidance to this category of client with some (two) reporting that less than 5% of their client base falls into this category. Some of the variability may be caused by reporting practices concerning 'pre-entry' clients – in many centres these are counted into the 'other' category. There appear to be client boundary issues in some centres however, particularly those that have a high level of staffing relative to the number of potential clients in a particular geographic area served by a VEC/WIT.

4.5 Referral

The level and type of inward referral to guidance services from other agencies and from the AEGS to other providers varies considerably across locations. We have seen (or heard via client and service feedback) exemplary practice where well coordinated referral arrangements exist between offices of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, the Local Employment Service (LES), the Probation Service and other relevant parties.

The guidance service questionnaire data suggest, however, that referral arrangements are not universally strong with the majority of inward referrals coming from the VEC/WIT (46% of referral sources) followed by self-referral (19% of referral sources).

There is some reluctance to refer to external agencies because of perceptions around relative expertise, agency boundaries and ownership – this is a particularly salient issue in the literacy area. There is a perception in some services that the approach to employment placement by the employment agency FÁS, has a different and more pragmatic objective to the more holistic

guidance perspective. This presents challenges to achieving seamless provision from a client perspective. There are also areas where appropriate referral is difficult because the required service is not available or under-resourced. Some Health Services Executive (HSE) based services and private services, e.g. educational psychological services are cases in point.

The referral barriers identified by services include:

- Poor understanding of the role and function of the AEGS on the part of both referral agencies and clients referred, sometimes leading to inappropriate referrals
- Difficulties accessing literacy clients
- Limited resources and long waiting lists.

In general, the results indicate that referral arrangements are overly reliant on personalities and relationships locally and need to be rooted more deeply and formally in agreed interagency practice. This suggests that it would be useful to develop formal protocols between the agencies and service providers. The Advisory Group is in a good position to address this particular challenge.

4.6 Guidance Delivery and Practice

It was clear from the services we visited that guidance services have highly skilled, hardworking and highly committed professionals amongst their staff, some of whom have pioneered approaches to engaging those who find it harder to engage in educational activity.

Different services have developed different strategies to manage local geographic and staffing challenges, some of which have been effective, some less so.

Much of the developmental work involved in setting up a new guidance service and establishing the necessary referring relationships has been accomplished in most areas at this point. This now leaves services more scope to concentrate on providing guidance and consolidating their services and systems. As the AEGS become well established, it is important to focus on guidance quality and capacity.

This is an important transition point and there are indications that some VECs/WIT and/or guidance services may need some direction and support in this regard. Examples include guidance staff sitting on committees and Advisory Groups long after initial contact with relevant service providers has been achieved. Another example is of guidance staff being overly involved in student recruitment into Further Education colleges. While we do not have evidence that this is a wide scale issue, we think it is important at this stage to clarify and re-emphasise the distinct *guidance* role of Guidance Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors in order to avoid 'role drift'.

As one stakeholder put it:

‘Guidance counselling is a specialized resource that is in short supply. While it is possible for guidance staff to fulfill other (non-guidance) roles and duties, other (non professionally qualified) staff cannot fulfill a guidance function’.

In terms of efficiency and service quality, it is important that both the Guidance Coordinator and the Guidance Counsellor remain focused on delivering a guidance service to their main client groups. The research indicates that good practice is where the AEO together with his or her adult education team assumes responsibility for linking the guidance service into educational services.

Guidance providers and representative bodies also identified a need, as the AEGS’ mature, to move from a predominantly developmental role to focus more on quality and maintenance of agreed standards. Our view is that at this point in time, an important role for the Advisory Group is to identify areas where more consistency in service delivery is desirable. One area highlighted by almost all parties was the development of quality standards. At present, there is no agreement as to who has responsibility for maintenance of good guidance practice, but it is a process that could be brokered by the Advisory Group and owned collectively.

4.6.1 Staffing and Maximising Resource Efficiencies

As noted in 4.2, a small number of services require another Guidance Counsellor. Different services have adopted different strategies to deal with understaffing. Some of these strategies include focusing on one or two target groups only or limiting guidance provision to fewer interviews per client while trying to achieve maximum geographic coverage.

While neither of these strategies is desirable, the preference, in a context of no additional resources, would be to provide a quality service to fewer, prioritised clients over trying to spread an under-resourced service too thinly. More generally, we think there may be scope for the DES to consider pooling resources collaboratively across VEC/WIT boundary areas, and to relocate staff within counties where a strong need/staff imbalance arises. In Galway, for example, the city service is better staffed than the county service and there may be some room for collaboration in this regard.

In large rural areas such as Galway, Mayo, County Cork and Kerry, that also include island communities serviced by AEGS, Guidance Counsellors spend a considerable amount of their time on the road, which is not always the best use of their time. While acknowledging that outreach is a requirement, there are more efficient ways to reach disparately located clients. For example, there is scope to make more use of distance learning techniques (in a guidance context), after an initial personal contact has been made, including for example, video conferencing, telephone help lines, on line support and so forth. This is in tune with international good practice.

4.6.2 Other Staffing Issues

There were IR issues in the past in respect of the Information Officer role and these were articulated elsewhere and are not revisited in this report.

Suffice to say much of the difficulty concerned lack of clarity around boundaries between the complementary roles of Guidance Counsellor and Information Officer. The respective roles of Information Officers and Guidance Coordinator have since been clarified through circulars issued by the Department of Education and Science. The circulars (included in Appendix Three) make it clear that guidance counselling is only to be provided by professionally qualified Guidance Counsellors who are employed in a guidance counselling position.

Some residual tensions remain around the role of Information Officer in some VEC/WIT locations. This suggests a need for Guidance Coordinators to work with Information Officers to highlight the importance of the information role. It would be useful to explore opportunities for professional development within the information role and to ensure the best use of their briefing, information gathering and data analysis skills.

There is scope for continuing boundary issues to arise. A number of Information Officers either have or are in the process of studying for a qualification in adult guidance. Some had started this course of study before entering the role of information and are funding it themselves. Some have started since entering the role. Decisions need to be made about whether the AEGI budget should be used to fund this training (in time and fee terms). By entering such a training commitment there is an understandable expectation by Information Officers that they will progress into adult guidance posts. However, there are very limited opportunities for such progression as most services are adequately staffed in terms of Guidance Counsellors. It is not always clear whether the individuals, the VEC/WIT or the AEGS is funding this training and it probably varies from place to place. There is a question mark over the appropriateness of the AEGS funding training of Information Officers as Guidance Counsellors unless a post is likely to become available.

The broader issue is the type and frequency of training provided to AEGS staff, which we discuss below.

4.7 In-Service Development, Training and NCGE Support

The feedback from guidance staff and from other stakeholders indicates that guidance counselling staff are very well resourced in terms of ongoing support from NCGE, professional training and external case load supervision. The uptake of external supervision is high and is appreciated by guidance staff.

A number of VECs and others questioned the need for the same level of ongoing in-service training in instances where the service is well established and supported by VECs. At this point in time, there is scope to reduce the amount of centralised training provision by NCGE. The Guidance Coordinators are well placed to provide induction for any new staff and

caseload supervision is being resourced by AEGI and availed of by most AEGS. There should be a clear rationale for additional in-service training. A model where each staff member is allocated a number of training days per year (3-5) might be worth considering.

The quality of support provided by NCGE has been described as exceptional throughout the implementation period and was identified as a major strength by all stakeholders. While there is a desire amongst many AEGS for ongoing contact with NCGE, the number of AEGS means that personal contact is practical only in cases where a difficulty is identified. There is scope to keep in contact with individual AEGS through increasing use of audio-visual communication and/or simply by telephone and to confine personal visits to instances where monitoring, evaluation or other events signal a particular need.

4.8 External Evaluation Arrangements

An external evaluator was appointed to the AEGI at its inception and attended the Advisory Group meetings for the period 2000-2007.

The external evaluator from Open Campus Learning, Glasgow Caledonian University is an expert in adult guidance for education and community based learning and development. The Advisory Group members and the services that we visited commented on how important his role and knowledge were particularly at the early stages of implementation when the initiative was new and everyone was feeling their way. The evaluation model that evolved was a developmental, action learning style of interaction, which fitted well with the implementation need at the time. Having access to an independent adult guidance expert with extensive experience of programme implementation was supportive to the Advisory Group and NCGE in particular, and facilitated the development of internal expertise in a consultative and collaborative manner over time.

Formative evaluation encouraged a process of reflective practice, and it strengthened the implementation of the initiative in many ways including:

Service level feedback

Each AEGS project was evaluated separately from inception and the formative evaluation process provided feedback on the implementation process at key stages. The Advisory Group was able to respond reasonably quickly to feedback and develop the guidance service in accordance with emerging good practice as encouraged by the external evaluator.

Documentation

The external evaluator documented how implementation was proceeding, what approaches and practices were utilised, what problems encountered, and impacts made at early and middle stages of work.

Planning

The evaluation activity assisted with planning and supported the Advisory Group to commit to particular goals. It also helped NCGE develop the vision of a high quality, non-directive adult guidance service. It is important to note

that the initiative developed on an organic centre-by-centre project basis initially.

Assessment

The evaluation provided an opportunity to monitor and assess the success of each AEGS, and the Advisory Group could choose to revise plans to take advantage of new opportunities or adapt to meet new or changing needs.

All stakeholders cited having this ongoing formative evaluation framework designed into the initiative from the outset as a major strength.

5. Good Practice and Strategic Issues

This section examines guidance from the VEC/WIT and learner's/client's perspective and then discusses good practice as described by the services and based on the analysis drawn from the site visits and other evaluation sources. A discussion of management and strategic issues follows.

5.1 Guidance from a VEC/WIT Perspective

The CEOs and senior management in the VEC's/WIT made it clear that there is a firm commitment to the guidance service on the basis of consistently positive feedback on the service and strong client demand for the service. The majority of CEOs consider the AEGS to be an integral component of the overall VEC/WIT service. They also recognise that there is a need to draw in those projects that remain tangential or somewhat disjointed from their VEC/WIT. In terms of the future development of adult guidance within AEGI, many hope that the client base can be widened to include guidance for all presenting adults. A number of CEOs and senior management are conscious of the need for stronger integration with other services locally through collaboration and good relations. The need for strong links with the adult literacy tutors was particularly emphasised. The other area the CEOs and senior management emphasised was the need to further develop a national vision for the AEGS into the future, and a clearly communicated strategic plan/direction.

5.2 Guidance from a Client Perspective

As indicated in the methodology section, we interviewed 101 adults who had experienced one-to-one guidance provided by AEGS. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive signifying a good quality guidance service overall, delivered personably and professionally while enhancing service provision in the VECs/WIT.

5.2.1 Awareness and Experience of Service

Clients became aware of the guidance service through a variety of methods. The most frequently cited method was through VTOS. In all other cases clients indicated that they were referred by someone (e.g. in FÁS or DSFA) or they found out about the service themselves through an advertisement, e.g. local paper, library, etc.

All sessions were held in the guidance service premises or on site in VTOS centres, etc. All respondents reported that they were comfortable with the premises in which sessions took place.

In the case of the VTOS and community-based clients, all benefited from a mix of group and one-to-one guidance sessions. The benefits of the group session were that individuals learnt from each other, built on others' questions and information sharing. They felt that it was good to cluster in a group as many people had similar questions. Group sessions were reported to be helpful in encouraging those who are apprehensive to take up the individual sessions

The following feedback illustrates aspects of the guidance service/process that clients consistently reported liking:

'I found the guidance counsellor friendly, welcoming and approachable'

'The solution-focused approach was really helpful in a practical way'

'Guidance helped me become motivated and inspired'

'I really appreciated the way my queries were answered promptly'

'Guidance helped me clarify what I want to do, it helped me to identify my strengths'

'Being listened to was really helpful'

'The guidance service has great resources, e.g. information, computers, tools, etc.'

'I found the approach to guidance to be very realistic and practical'

'I appreciated the efforts made to research financial support and non-VEC courses'

'I really liked the non-directive nature – I found it very different to my experience of school guidance'

'I had a great stock take'

'Guidance was a great boost to my confidence'

'It's great to know you can re-enter guidance after leaving the course to prepare for an interview'

'The coaching and support pre interview is great'

Aspects of the guidance experience that clients reported having difficulty with include:

'Sometimes sessions are too short, for example, during some VTOS guidance inputs, individual twenty minutes slots are arranged'

'I had difficulty getting an appointment'

'Sometimes it's difficult to get through on the phone – it's always an answering machine'

'The guidance service is not being proactive enough with people who need additional encouragement e.g. a Guidance Counsellor following up with them after 3 or 4 weeks if they have not returned or engaged fully'

'I completed an interest inventory and did not receive feedback or a follow up session. I did ring a couple of times but no-one got back to me.'

'I was promised information/notification about a course and did not receive it. I was very disappointed to find that a suitable course had started and I had missed the opportunity to enroll.'

A number of clients indicated a need for more structured ICT inputs, many did not know how to access the different guidance and career resources available on line. Information Officers could provide this type of support.

There was some variation in the number of one-to-one sessions that clients had with their Guidance Counsellor, ranging from one to over twelve sessions (which in some cases was because of progression between different courses). Three-to-four sessions were the norm. We encountered a small number of clients who were only provided with one session when it was clear from them that more were needed. They had expected feedback from inventories they had completed and on choices being researched.

The majority of adult learners met with the Guidance Counsellor at the beginning and some during a course. All of the respondents indicated that the optimum time for a first meeting with a Guidance Counsellor is *prior* to choosing a course. They pointed out guidance should occur before you finalise your course choice as this ensures informed choices are made. It was felt that the optimum timing pattern for guidance sessions are pre-entry, during course attendance, towards the end of a course with an aftercare session to follow. The results suggest that a minimum of one group guidance session and three one-to-one sessions is necessary to fully engage with and support an adult client through their educational journey. This is a broad guideline with the needs of the client determining the level of guidance required.

The fieldwork revealed considerable variation in the kind of guidance provided across services. For example, some services limited guidance to educational choices only, making referrals to FÁS or the LES should more vocational or work oriented explorations be required. Other services had a more holistic orientation based on a view that the type of education clients were engaged in was largely vocational and if guidance that addressed job-seeking skills was needed, it should be provided in the context of an already established relationship. As such, these Guidance Counsellors provided inputs on CV and interview preparation as the need arose or as course completion approached.

This dovetails with Mc Namara's (1998) finding that there is a need for a 'full guidance service'. (p29). Mc Namara's survey found that student's think vocational guidance and educational guidance should not be 'divorced' and that both should be available to them. This issue needs to be explored further by the Advisory Group and clarified with individual services.

5.2.2 Barriers to and Enablers of Guidance

During the focus groups we asked clients to identify the main barriers that prevent adults from accessing guidance services and to identify approaches that encourage adults who have had negative experiences of the education system.

The main barriers identified relate to interpersonal/social skills and include:

- Embarrassment
- Shyness/anxiety
- Fear
- Sense of isolation and that no one cares
- Apathy
- Lack of confidence

The best approaches to encouraging adult learners to understand and use a guidance service, as suggested by guidance clients include:

Awareness Raising

'The guidance service needs to be explained to people – it can be a bit mysterious, so raise awareness of what guidance is and what it can do'

'It's important to connect with people – for example by making personal contact and by knowing a student's name'

'Encouraging students informally is important so that they can approach in their own time. This is a really good way to overcome any fears they might have'

Initial Contact

'It is important to emphasise and practice confidentiality so that students feel safe'

'Provide group guidance initially to encourage students and give them a sense of direction.'

'Taking it gently is helpful'

'A good approach is when Guidance Counsellors let the client talk first and slowly open up'

'A good way to encourage guidance is by using ex clients to promote the service'

5.2.3 Benefits/Difference Guidance Made to AEGI Client's Lives

The majority of respondents found guidance to be very beneficial in terms of their educational continuance, progression and knowledge about options available to them. The benefits reported by clients include impacts on practical, personal and educational challenges:

'It (guidance) led to changes in my life for the better'

'It instilled me with confidence'

'It helped me develop a 'can do' attitude'

'Guidance provided me with practical help with my CVs and helped me develop interview techniques'

'It helped me sort through tax, grant and welfare entitlements'

'I now feel that I have options – it broadened my horizons'

'I feel more informed to make better choices'

'I feel clearer and more motivated'

'I see opportunities that I never saw before'

'I have a much better understanding of my strengths and what type of work suits me best'

'It gave me direction and set me on a path'

'I feel much more secure – it's good to know that the service is there for you if you need it'

A significant number (over 20%) of those interviewed said that guidance was instrumental in their remaining in a particular course or in education, following changes in course direction mediated through guidance. Literacy clients, many of whom had very low expectations of the system, reported some of the strongest impacts. With the guidance support they had progressed into intensive literacy in some cases and in others to mainstream training of their choice.

Many of the clients saw the AEGS as part of the VEC/WIT. During discussions it was evident that clients do not think or care about such matters as where a service fits or who 'owns' it. What matters from a client perspective is the warmth and commitment of the Guidance Counsellor together with the quality, accessibility and availability of guidance services.

5.2.4 Client Suggestions for Improvement of Adult Guidance Provision

The majority of clients had nothing but praise and gratitude for the service that they had received. Many were reluctant to make suggestions for improvement, as they were happy with the service as is. In the context of very favourable experiences generally, guidance clients made the following suggestions:

‘Provide bigger and better buildings in convenient locations and with bigger rooms’

‘Provide more of the same, more staff, etc.’

‘Provide access to more computers and resources to help clients explore options and interests’

‘Raise awareness of guidance service by attending courses at the beginning to explain service’

‘Use existing or past clients to raise awareness and to explain the service to new clients’

‘Send mail shots about AEGS to people in receipt of benefits from the Department of Social and Family Affairs’

‘Put up posters, e.g. in DSFA and Post Office, Jobs Club, etc. and provide a name and contact number’

Most of the suggestions were about increasing the awareness of the service amongst potential clients, which testifies to their opinion of the importance of the guidance service.

5.3 Good Practice from a Service/Practitioner Perspective

There is a strong emphasis in the Terms of Reference for this study on good practice. This prompted, in turn, our focus on what good practice means in analysis of questionnaires returned by guidance services, site visits and practice on the ground.

The response from the guidance services on these items in the questionnaires was less expansive than expected. Of the twenty-seven services that responded, just thirteen provided detailed responses to the four-point item on good practice. There are a number of possible reasons why this might be the case. Services may not recognise or be in a position to articulate their own good practice or services may be suffering from evaluation fatigue making them reluctant to devote time to filling out questionnaires.

This suggests that services would benefit from revisiting good practice to help them recognise and further develop their own strengths.

5.3.1 Examples of Good Practice

Some of the examples of good practice descriptions provided by AEGS are presented below. Much of the content demonstrates recognition of the importance of collaboration, consultation and structured input that is informed by and meets the expressed needs of community-based clients and those who find it hard to access education:

'We are currently engaged in a consultation process with community education groups to establish a clear and structured guidance input for these groups. Previously engagement was more on an ad hoc basis and tended to lose momentum after a year or two. Therefore, our initial step was to bring all Coordinators and other relevant parties together in one place to elicit the needs of their students as well outlining the guidance inputs we could possibly offer to students. Based on this information, we will arrange meetings with community education providers to clarify their exact needs and then agree a program to meet these needs.'

'Our guidance input may occur at any level of engagement and it may not be a linear path of engagement, for example, feedback from one-to-one sessions may lead to preplanning with a course tutor about the need for future guidance input or meeting a key stakeholder may lead to individual one-to-one session.'

'This is an alternative to the in-house, add-on, on-site practice of past guidance tradition. In addition, we think it is key that the guidance service works collaboratively with stakeholders in local communities and agencies, to provide a holistic service to learners thinking about doing a course in their own community, progressing within a course and thinking about the next steps.'

'Guidance is built into all Literacy Groups from the start so that group guidance is offered at least twice to all groups and group introductory guidance is also offered to those in Community Education.'

'A High Support Meeting is held every six weeks. This network was initiated by the Jobs Facilitator of Social Welfare and has grown to include 10 service providers mainly; DSFA, FÁS, VEC, HSE, Probation, LES and Supported Employment. Guest speakers are also arranged for these meetings.'

5.3.2 Composite Features of Good Practice

The AEGI has been identified as a model of good practice at EU level. One of the features commented on in that regard, is the broad representative base of its membership, which is inclusive of management, representative bodies and guidance experts. The independence and representativeness of the Advisory Group is important in a context where the guidance is managed locally by VECs/WIT and provided to VEC/WIT and non-VEC/WIT clients. The

involvement of guidance experts from the NCGE and the Department of Education and Science is also important in this regard, and in the context of developing, supporting and maintaining good practice.

We saw examples of exemplary practice during the site visits, stakeholders also drew attention to what they considered good practice and in addition we examined materials produced by the National Guidance Forum, the National Centre for Guidance in Education, the OECD and others. Based on this combined wisdom we present a composite picture of good practice drawn from theory and practice on the ground. While we recognise that challenges vary across locations and with target groups, good practice is firmly associated with a supportive and involved ethos within the VEC/WIT and strong personal commitment of guidance staff. The model that works best was one where the guidance staff was clearly part of an adult education *team* led by an AEO who had a firm focus on co-ordinating the team and collaborating with the range of service providers. This model is summarised as follows:

Composite Model of Good Practice

Good Practice Direction and Support

- The Department of Education and Science has overall management responsibility for the AEGI.
- All Advisory Group stakeholders have joint responsibility for supporting, monitoring and evaluating the AEGI and advising the Department of Education and Science accordingly.
- The NCGE supports good practice and, gathers and analyses monitoring and evaluation data and communicates progress on target group priorities and other objectives to the Advisory Group and AEGS.

Good Practice Management and Coordination within VECs/WIT

- The AEO is responsible for overall strategic management and coordination of adult education and guidance services.
- The AEO promotes the guidance service within the VEC/WIT and externally and ensures that all relevant parties are fully aware of the role of the guidance service and how it can be accessed. The AEO develops linkages between the guidance service and adult education internally.
- The Guidance Coordinator reports to the AEO and manages guidance and information staff.

- The Guidance Coordinator/Counsellor consults with and builds close working relationships with the Adult Literacy Organiser, Community Education Organiser/facilitator, VTOS and the BTEI Coordinators and other relevant parties in order to develop supported and sustainable contacts with target groups.

Good Practice Delivery

- The Guidance Coordinator or Guidance Counsellor as appropriate, in association with the adult education team plans, develops and delivers structured inputs to different client groups as appropriate. This may include informal meet and greet sessions followed by introduction to guidance workshops/group work sessions, which then move into one-to-one sessions.
- The Guidance Coordinator or Guidance Counsellor as appropriate, in consultation with the adult education team sets an annual objective to make personal contact with an agreed number of target group clients²⁷
- The Guidance Coordinator or Guidance Counsellor as appropriate, plans, structures and schedules guidance inputs with off site clients (e.g. literacy, community groups, social welfare service offices and probations service clients).
- The Guidance Coordinator and/or Guidance Counsellor provides one group and three individual sessions (depending on needs) with target group clients
- The Guidance Coordinator and/or Guidance Counsellor is responsive to time pressures e.g. seeing clients after 6pm and at weekends²⁸
- The Information Officer in consultation with the Guidance Coordinator/Guidance Counsellor actively researches and supports client information and ICT needs in a holistic manner
- The AEGS is firmly integrated with local support services and encourages cross referral to/from social welfare service offices, primary schools (parents whose children would benefit from their returning to education), community groups, FÁS and others
- AEGS ensure guidance time with clients on an individual and group basis is prioritised and managed accordingly
- Guidance provision is integrated with information service provision.

²⁷ This agreed number of target group clients must be challenging but achievable, and agreed locally with the VEC management/further education team.

²⁸ The provision of service at weekends in one service is based on local arrangements.

On the second two indents, we met with/had feedback from a number of services that had forged strong relationships with offices of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, homeless and probation services. As with the adult literacy client group, the emphasis was on working with clients from where they are at, usually incorporating pre-guidance developmental work on a group basis until they are ready for more formal one-to-one work. The merit of this approach is endorsed by the quality of feedback provided by clients with this background that we interviewed as part of the evaluation.

5.4 Overall Management and Strategic Direction of Guidance Services

The guidance services have evolved considerably since their inception. For the most part they are more firmly embedded in the VEC/WIT than previously with the majority of services seeing the VEC/WIT as 'being at the helm' and the main source of support in the event of challenges or issues arising in the course of their work. Well over half of the guidance services believe there is a good fit with the ethos of VEC/WIT and with their vision for service provision, with just under half of the services believing there is a good fit with VEC/WIT planning cycle.

In terms of strategic direction or advice, the most frequently relied upon source of strategic direction or advice was the VEC followed by NCGE. While the fit with the VECs seems to be reasonably strong in most cases, both the CEOs and services reported that some projects are still tangential or somewhat disjointed from their VEC/WIT. In some cases this is because of physical location. Services are better integrated when they share physical premises with the VEC/WIT. The key to successful integration, however, is the AEO or their equivalent incorporating the guidance service into an integrated approach to adult education generally, while respecting the distinct contribution of guidance to adult learners inside *and* outside the VEC/WIT. This research indicates that the VEC is the most appropriate home for the guidance service, particularly when there is a real commitment to integration as there is in most cases. The advantages include:

- Better coordination and integration of service provision within and between agencies
- Service stability
- Good access to clients
- Strong supportive contribution by the VEC/WITs
- Potential to increase retention, completion and progression rates by enriching learner's decision-making capacity.
- Shared organisational learning across structures and more coherent 'joined up' strategic planning

The challenges include:

- Providing impartial information and guidance on all further and higher educational options for adults
- Ensuring all target groups access guidance equitably
- Ensuring guidance staff do not drift or are not drawn into non guidance activities within the VEC/WITs (ongoing meetings, committees, recruitment activity, teaching etc);
- Ensuring non-VEC/WIT located clients are provided with as good a service as those who are already part of the VEC/WIT system.
- Administrative constraints/delays, e.g. length of time to replace guidance staff in large bureaucracies.
- Integrating into an established/different organisational culture

These challenges can be successfully managed as long as all parties are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities.

On a related but separate issue, just one of the guidance services (Regional Educational Guidance Service for Adults - REGSA in Waterford city) is located outside of VEC structures at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). This needs to be examined mindful of the important history of REGSA and the sensitivities that surround any organisational change. This research was overarching and did not home in on any one service so it is not possible to present a strong evidence based case for the future positioning of REGSA. However, based on the results of this research (e.g. strong role of the VEC, nature of the specified target groups, fit within VEC management, funding and support structures, etc.) it would be wise to draw Waterford city project into the greater AEGS fold so as to ensure continuity, similarity and fit with the other services nationwide. This means that REGSA would be wise to strengthen its links with the VEC structure in the Waterford city. We appreciate that this might need to be teased out further but this is our best advice as the AEGS enters a consolidated phase as a nationwide service.

In terms of overall management of the services throughout Ireland, the senior VEC/WIT managers and services consulted reported that they felt that the AEGI's national profile needs to be developed more strongly. The feedback from the senior VEC/WIT managers and from the services on the ground also indicated that services are not clear about the overall management of the service, and the roles of the respective parties in management, namely the Department of Education and Science, NCGE, the Advisory Group, and the National Coordinator. A need for more contact with and direction from the Department of Education and Science was also signaled.

5.5 Evolving Role of NCGE

This brings us to the role of NCGE as a national expert agency in the area of guidance in education that provides technical support and leadership in relation to the integration of quality guidance into adult education.

As noted, many of the AEGS have progressed beyond their start up phase and are shifting their focus on to quality systems and standards. A prominent theme emerging from the stakeholder consultations, with members of the Advisory Group and the VECs/WIT, was the need for a corresponding shift in the role of NCGE technical support from predominantly 'start up' development to include a quality systems and standards oriented function. More than half of those consulted raised this concern. There is enough variation across services in terms of accessing target groups, referral practice and amount and type of guidance provision to merit the development of protocols on the kinds of quality standards all stakeholders wish to see maintained.

This variation is rooted in the local origins of AEGS. On the positive front, the local emphasis allowed the pilot projects to build services that were responsive to local needs. However, the AEGS are sufficiently different in some instances that clients might receive a very different service in different locations.

The majority of those services and VECs/WIT consulted believe that adult guidance does not have a strong national identity. This is partly a result of the project-based model that underpinned the development of the AEGI. It contrasts with a more centrally planned approach which originates in a mapping exercise that identifies needs and resources across different locations systematically and develops a formal strategy with clear aims and objectives to address adult guidance needs nationally and locally. While the project based approach has many advantages, namely the opportunity to grow directly and quickly from locally referenced needs and the encouragement of innovative practice, there are inherent challenges. These include the development of a consistent, accessible, high quality service, which is similar across different sites nationally. Another challenge is to ensure resource efficiency by avoiding duplication and tensions around service boundaries. There is a need to strengthen the national identity, vision and strategy for the service. It is important to clarify the role of NCGE in this regard.

This is good point in time for the AEGI to build on key strengths and the work done by the National Guidance Forum to articulate the kind of quality standards it wishes to encourage so that consistency of guidance provision is developed across AEGS. It is important that there is shared ownership of and commitment to any such process.

There is also an opportunity and a need to clarify and communicate the respective roles of NCGE, the Advisory Group and the Department of Education and Science. In terms of communication, one of the suggestions made is that NCGE make an input into the annual conference of the IVEA. A

revisiting of the service level agreement by VECs/WIT with the Department of Education and Science may also be helpful as many services are not familiar with its content.

5.6 Guidance Data Collection and Analysis

The development of the Adult Guidance Monitoring System (AGMS) was instigated, coordinated and funded by NCGE in consultation with DES. A considerable amount of data are agreed locally and are confidential and thus not accessible by either NCGE or DES.

Having said that, many services reported spending considerable amounts of time maintaining data, much of which does not appear to inform their work.

Data are collected for three main purposes: monitoring data for the Department and the ESF (which is non-negotiable), data for NCGE/the Advisory Group and data for internal guidance monitoring purposes. The following data issues were raised:

- Some services said that in addition to tracking guidance clients, they are logging every meeting and activity that they are engaged in.
- A number of services questioned the amount of data being produced for the NCGE when no feedback to services was being provided.²⁹
- The NCGE does not have the resources currently to analyse all data collected for central purposes.

From an evaluation perspective, the data collected centrally are very useful and appears to be well maintained. Some data points need to be improved, notably the 'other' category under the 'target group' heading which is functioning as a catchall category at present and much valuable explanatory information is being lost. As a rule of thumb if the 'other' category is accounting for more than 5%, valuable data is being lost.

The following data points are essential for monitoring and evaluation purposes:

- Department of Education and Science monitoring information (demographics and educational/employment background of clients)
- Entry Status – pre-entry, course/programme enrolled on, post completion
- Target Group with 'other' category broken down into significant non-target group categories (employed, asylum seeker, etc).

²⁹ It should be noted that all stakeholders on the Advisory Group receive copies of the quarterly reports and a summary of themes emerging. These often inform how the advisory group addresses issues emerging for the AEGS. Each stakeholder can also use them for feedback to their representative groups.

- FETAC details
- Number of one-to-one Guidance sessions per client/target group
- Number of hours in one-to-one guidance
- Group guidance sessions by client/target group
- Referring agent
- Referring activity (e.g. movement from group into one-to-one guidance)
- Onward referral
- Difficulties with onward referral (if relevant)
- Impacts from guidance if relevant (retention, progression, personal effectiveness, increased knowledge to inform decision making etc)
- Number of hours Guidance Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors spend on one-to one guidance, guidance, administration, networking and travel.
- Progression/tracking

The 'other' category needs to be broken down into significant non-target group categories (employed, asylum seeker etc).

It would also be useful to have a breakdown of how the Guidance Counsellors divide their time between one-to-one, group work, administration, networking and travel.

Most of the required information is available from the database. A considerable amount of other data is also collected. It might be a good point in time to conduct a utility exercise, examining the usefulness of other data – if this data is not aiding the Advisory Group's understanding of the services or their decision-making and/or there are no resources to analyse and disseminate them, collection should be suspended until the situation changes.

5.7 Mainstreaming

The definitions of ‘mainstreaming’ provided by stakeholders focused on the following dimensions, each of which can be seen as different stages of a developmental continuum:

Security of funding



Clarity around funding and staffing/tenure



Assimilation into VEC/WIT education services



Seamless, learner centered integration with adult/further education Services

All of those consulted are of the view that the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative is mainstreamed *de facto* if mainstreaming is defined as being ‘part and parcel’ of adult education provision. Most stakeholders were confident that funding will continue and that the benefits of guidance had been well demonstrated within the adult education arena.

A small number of services raised questions about clarity regarding funding as and between the AEGS and the VEC/WIT. Guidance spend does not have a separate cost centre in all of the VECs/WIT, and this may need to be looked at. We cannot comment in any detail about costs, as they were not part of the terms of reference of this research. However, our sense is that the administration of the guidance services through the VEC/WIT structure results in cost savings, given that the budgets granted do not provide for accommodation or any other below the line costs, which are absorbed by the VECs/WIT.

In most cases, AEGS have been well assimilated into the VEC/WIT system. In some cases, there is evidence of seamless integration between adult and further education services. This is very much dependent on there already being a seamless approach to adult education within those VECs/WIT. The history of European Social Fund funding has resulted in different training initiatives within further education acquiring distinct identities, with separate funding, recruitment and staffing arrangements. This means that a programme specific system has evolved. This is very different from the vision of a seamless approach to educational delivery that can respond to the needs of learners that the Department of Education and Science and other stakeholders wish to achieve. Reform is necessary to ensure that learners are supported to develop and upgrade their competencies with knowledge of what is available and ease of access within and between different educational and training systems in the community through to third level.

5.8 Vision for the Future

The vision of the different adult guidance stakeholders, including the Department of Education and Science, representative bodies and NCGE is aligned. All of the major parties that contribute to the policy development of adult guidance in education aspire to AEGI becoming seamlessly integrated with adult/further educational activity while maintaining a learner-centred and non-directive focus.

In the longer-term, a number of stakeholders would like to see the adult guidance service made available to all adult learners. Ultimately, their vision is that the guidance service would play a major role in achieving the objectives of the National Skills Strategy.

6 Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions of the research and is followed by a set of recommendations in section seven.

The Adult Educational Guidance Initiative is successfully established. The results of this research indicate that the AEGI is making a real difference in terms of individual adults' experiences of education and adding value to VEC/WIT programmes and delivery systems. It has also had significant impacts on other delivery systems in the wider community, where AEGS have made strong links with community organisations and important referring agencies such as offices of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Probation Service.

6.1 Effectiveness of the AEGI

The AEGI is in the process of meeting its objectives to:

- Provide adult educational guidance to learners in adult literacy, VTOS and community education programmes;
- Develop and document models of good guidance practice which could be mainstreamed and which could impact on future policy;
- Address gaps in the provision of adult educational guidance;
- Build local capacity to develop support structures for adults in education and encouraging local partnerships.

Some refocusing is necessary, however, in order that target group priorities are fully achieved.

Adults who have received one-to-one guidance support report positive experiences that have subsequently, in many cases, led to positive impacts in terms of educational enrichment, continuance in programmes and progression. There is some evidence of unevenness in terms of different target groups' access to guidance provision. VTOS students are dramatically more likely to enter into guidance relationships than members of other target groups. This is most pronounced in the case of adult literacy clients. The guidance staff and NALA are acutely conscious of the need to improve access for these clients. There are examples of approaches worth emulating. In the case of a least one guidance service (CDVEC), which has had an almost exclusive focus on this adult literacy client group significant progress was made in overcoming some of the barriers to accessing adult literacy students. The feedback from clients of this service indicates that guidance made a significant difference to their clients' ability to access and benefit from appropriate services.

There is a clear need here for the adult literacy and guidance services to jointly plan and agree an approach to ensure all adult literacy clients have some level of contact with the guidance service that can be built on when

one-to-one guidance is required. This may need to be backed up by a Department of Education and Science mandate that communicates that guidance is part of the service provided to adult literacy clients and that literacy organisers have a key role in facilitating an introduction to the guidance service.

More efforts are necessary to increase the guidance access of BTEI students in community education programmes. The results of this research indicate that the model of providing guidance to groups that can lead on to one-to-one guidance (timetabled into course provision) is the most effective way to increase access. This approach is well suited to community groups and needs to be widely adopted by the AEGS.

In terms of the BTEI cohort, data were not gathered separately on this group specifically until recently. This has made it difficult to distinguish trends. The 2006 figures suggest that guidance uptake is low. It is important that data on the BTEI subgroups that have been prioritised by the Department of Education and Science (Members of the Traveller community, ex-offenders, lone parents) is gathered to ensure that trends can be examined in future. Guidance services need to ensure that they have a list of all BTEI students in their area to ensure that telephone/mail introductions can be made in the first instance. Arrangements based on coordination with the Probation Service, offices of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and Senior Traveller Education centres, for example, appear to be successful in increasing BTEI client awareness and uptake of guidance.

The results of this research indicate that the focus on the distinct target groups is appropriate and should continue in the immediate future. Even if additional funding were available, we would not recommend expanding the target groups without strong evidence that those who find education services more difficult to engage with, are accessing guidance in numbers that are proportionate to their size.

6.2 Staffing Resources and Maximising Efficiencies

The results of this research indicate that the guidance service overall is adequately staffed³⁰ in most cases for providing a quality service to the select target groups. Any cut in funding, however, would be detrimental, as most services have a baseline staffing level to provide a quality service to existing target groups.

A small number of services need an additional Guidance Counsellor, namely Cork County and Dublin city. It may be possible to pool/transfer staff across VECs/WIT in some cases. In the event that additional guidance resources cannot be identified, our recommendation is that Guidance Counsellors prioritise their client groups to those with greatest need/ least opportunity to access other guidance resources (e.g. adult literacy clients).

³⁰ While no exact comparators are available the AEGS is well staffed compared to guidance staffing in Irish universities or the IT sector where typically (as confirmed with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors) each guidance person has a caseload of several thousand students.

The criteria for approving additional guidance staff may need to be examined to take account of staffing to target group ratios. The population in some areas is too small to require more than one guidance professional. For example in Carlow, one guidance co-ordinator and an information officer could provide a full guidance and information service.

There may be scope within some guidance services to improve efficiencies in terms of the number of guidance hours provided. It would be useful for each service to do an analysis of how time is being spent so that administrative duties (e.g. maintenance/analysis of data) are delegated wherever possible to the Information Officer and attendance at non-essential meetings or committees is minimised. In rural areas, the time spent travelling between different centres can be significant. While a face-to-face meeting is essential for an initial guidance encounter, increased use of audio-visual and telephone resources for e-guidance follow-up should be considered. The combination of broadband, voice over internet protocol (VOIP) and Webcams allow for ease of use and access at a minimal cost (assuming broad band is available). This is an area around which training/technical advice might be provided.

6.3 Referral

There is a need to develop protocols between the range of inward and external referring parties. This will ensure the development of standardised referral practices so that clients have access to the full range of services available to them. This is most urgent in the case of adult literacy clients. It is important that FÁS and the AEGS work together to maximise guidance resources and to ensure a seamless service for clients. This is important in a local context, but also in terms of the vision for national lifelong learning and guidance, which envisages all adults upgrading their educational qualifications. Coordinated, integrated guidance provision has an obvious role in the achievement of this ambitious goal. There is a need for greater clarity around different roles and responsibilities. This is something that should be worked out at national level, possibly in the form of competency profiles and referral protocols, which are agreed and implemented locally.

6.4 Evaluation

The AEGI has been comprehensively evaluated on an ongoing basis since its inception. The evaluation framework and its outputs had positive impacts on the development and initial implementation of the AEGI. The evaluator's involvement in the AEGI over the 2000-2007 period was intensive to a degree that was appropriate and appreciated at the time. While evaluation will continue to be important, it is likely that it will take a different shape in tune with the stages of development of the AEGI. The emphasis from now on should be on quality assurance, benchmarking and self-evaluation. This should be complemented by a national external evaluation from time to time as appropriate. It will be important to standardise processes and practices so as to strengthen the role of the Advisory Group in steering the adult educational guidance services.

6.5 Management

It is timely to examine the membership and role of the Advisory Group now that the AEGI has been successfully developed and implemented. The size of the Advisory Group could be reduced to a core membership of the Department of Education and Science (Further Education and Guidance Inspectorate), NGCE, target group representative bodies, and the IVEA. Other parties can be consulted or invited to sit on a sub-committee when particular needs arise.

Most stakeholders recognise that the role of the Advisory Group needs to evolve from the predominantly developmental focus that was appropriate during the start-up phase to a more strategic and maintenance oriented role with a focus on quality standards, quality assurance and achieving the policy objective of seamless integration with different providers in further education.

More generally, central management of the programme needs strengthening. At present it is not clear which party should step in or how should individual services deviate from stated policy. There has been key staff turnover on a regular basis at the relevant section in the Department of Education and Science and at NCGE (three Directors, three National Co-ordinators and two Guidance Officers), which has probably inhibited streamlined administration arrangements from emerging.

A finding of the evaluation is a need for all of the parties involved in overseeing the AEGI to conduct a role clarification exercise. There is a lack of clarity about where local management ends and central management begins. There is confusion on the ground about the roles and responsibilities of the National Coordinator, the NCGE³¹ and the Department of Education and Science. A more comprehensive statement of the roles and responsibilities of the different parties on NCGE website would be helpful in this regard.

There is a need to revisit the service level agreement document with the VECs/WIT and guidance services with a view to refocusing on how the guidance service integrates with different service providers/target groups within and external to the VEC/WIT system. At present, groups that are within the VEC/WIT structure are enjoying much greater access than groups that are more dispersed or external to the VEC/WIT. This disparity needs to be addressed.

³¹ While the National Co-ordinator is part of the NCGE role there is confusion about this on the ground.

6.6 Data Gathering and Maintenance

A good data system (AGMS) was designed for the adult educational guidance service and compliance amongst services in making the necessary returns is high.

There was some criticism from guidance services about the amount of data that have to be gathered and the lack of central feedback/analysis of that data. There was little evidence that guidance services are actively using the data they gather to inform their practice and strategic direction. Guidance data are being gathered but are not optimally utilised, locally or centrally. This has been recently addressed through recent NCGE training for Guidance Co-ordinators held in May 2008.

At this point in time, it might be worthwhile conducting an analysis of what data are needed. The following data points are essential for monitoring and evaluation purposes:

- Department of Education and Science monitoring information (demographics and educational/employment background of clients)
- Entry Status – pre-entry, course/programme enrolled on, post completion
- Target Group with ‘other’ category broken down into significant non-target group categories (employed, asylum seeker etc).
- FETAC Details
- Number of one-to-one Guidance sessions per client/target group
- Number of hours in one-to-one guidance
- Group guidance sessions by client/target group
- Referring agent
- Referring activity (e.g. movement from group into one-to-one guidance)
- Onward referral
- Difficulties with onward referral (if relevant)
- Impacts from guidance if relevant (retention, progression, personal effectiveness, increased knowledge to inform decision making etc)
- Number of hours Guidance Coordinators and Counsellors spend on one-to-one guidance, group guidance, administration, networking and travel.
- Progression/tracking

Most of these data are already gathered. Those that are not should be added. Those data that are gathered and do not conform to these categories should be reviewed as to their relevance.

Some of these data points are useful from a policy and practice perspective. For example, all services should be monitoring the amount of hours spent providing guidance with a view to increasing the hours available. Similarly, target group data should be triggering activity to increase utilisation of guidance services.

It would be useful to have quarterly statistics that provide the Advisory Group, the VEC/WIT (AEOs and CEOs) with snapshots based on aggregated data that speak to the AEGI objectives. For example, the percentage of adult literacy clients (or any other target group) taking up one-to-one guidance nationally could be calculated on a quarterly basis. This would encourage active planning on behalf of guidance services.

It is arguably better to have a smaller number of well-defined indicators that are well maintained, systematically analysed, monitored and regularly communicated than to attempt to capture all aspects of the guidance experience, (much of which is not amenable to measurement) and fall short in terms of analysis and utility. The qualitative aspects, also important, can be explored at intervals as necessary through the medium of focus groups or short surveys conducted independently.

6.6 Good Practice

The results of this research show that good practice is associated with a supportive and involved ethos within the VEC/WIT and strong personal commitment of guidance staff. The model that works best is one where the guidance staff form an integral part of the adult education team led by an AEO with a firm focus on working in collaboration with other service providers. Guidance clients raised the importance of pre-entry guidance and this is an area that needs to be addressed further. All target group applicants should be made aware of the AEGS and encouraged to discuss their options before finalising their application.

The elements of good practice evident from this research are drawn into a composite model presented in Section 5.3.2. The model is broad enough not to be prescriptive and is in keeping with the policy goal of a guidance service that is seamlessly integrated with further education services. It also encourages an approach that is proactive in terms of achieving access of the different target groups.

6.7 Final Comments

The AEGI is meeting a real need for adult educational guidance and is adding considerable value to adult further education services. The commitment to a strong evaluative culture since the outset has led to the development of a programme that is responsive to the issues that arise and to the needs of its

clients. The pilot project based model from which the AEGI developed, allowed individual AEGS develop a range of approaches to encouraging adults, most of whom have had negative earlier experiences of education, to access and utilise guidance to their educational benefit. Overall, the AEGI has been successfully and thoughtfully implemented and has had strong positive impacts on clients' capacity to make informed educational choices. It has also enriched their educational experience leading to enhanced continuance and progression.

The results of this research indicate that the AEGI is an effective policy instrument that has great potential as a driver of and an essential support for lifelong learning. Funding of the AEGI should continue as part of mainstream adult educational provision. Some fine-tuning is required, however. There is evidence of some unevenness of approach across a range of issues as a result of the project based development model. This is a good point in time to draw together the collective learning from individual AEGS in the form of what constitutes good practice from the perspective of learners, service providers, representative stakeholders and evaluation findings. This will help strengthen the collective identity of the AEGI, in the sense that adults approaching different guidance services can expect and receive a similar quality of experience.

The features of good practice that need to be embedded in all adult educational guidance services touch on organisational, professional and interpersonal factors (see model in Section 5.3.2). The continuation of the exemplary practices in adult education embracing guidance services that have emerged in some settings and the consistent adoption of good practice across all guidance settings will make inroads into achieving educational equality.

In order to encourage this process, all parties to the guidance relationship, including the VEC/WIT and the AEGS must share a strong belief that the learners' needs are primary and that those needs rather than institutional or other interests inform clients' educational and guidance journey.

A number of relatively minor changes could deepen the impact of the AEGI significantly by encouraging the universal implementation of processes that encourage good guidance practice. These adjustments will ensure that a more balanced client profile across services is developed and that all clients derive maximum benefit from their involvement with adult educational guidance and adult education. These adjustments form the basis of the recommendations made in the next section.

7. Recommendations

This section presents a set of recommendations that arise out of the research conclusions as outlined in the previous section.

7.1 Continuance

The Department of Education and Science should continue to fund the AEGI as part of mainstream adult educational provision.

7.2 Target Group Focus

The Department of Education and Science policy focus on distinct target groups of the AEGI is appropriate and it should be sustained until there is strong evidence that all target groups are accessing guidance in numbers that are proportionate to their size.

7.3 Literacy Target Group

7.3.1 The AEGI Advisory Group (on which NALA is represented) and NALA should jointly plan an agreed approach that ensures all literacy clients receive some level of contact with the AEGS.

7.3.2 NALA and the AEGI Advisory Group should recommend that an introduction to guidance be incorporated into the initial education programme for adult-literacy organisers.

7.3.3 NALA should consider making an awareness raising input at the AEGI annual conference or any other significant guidance training events.

7.3.4 The Department of Education and Science should inform the VECs/WIT and adult literacy organisers (ALOs) that guidance should play a fundamental part in the adult literacy programme. In turn, the adult literacy organisers should adopt a key role in facilitating the introduction and access for students to the AEGS.

7.4 Other Target Groups

7.4.1 AEGS should work closely with the VECs/WIT to improve access for BTEI students in the community where proportional take-up by these clients is not evident.

7.4.2 AEGS should continue to set annual objectives and draw up action plans in collaboration with their AEO/local management and relevant parties to make and maintain contact with all members of the designated target groups in their area.

7.4.3 All AEGS should maximize the use of group guidance approaches to support one-to-one guidance for students. This should, as far as possible, be timetabled into course provision. As a guideline, to facilitate good planning, group guidance should be supported by one-to-one sessions with clients, as appropriate.

7.5 Good Practice & Management of the AEGS

7.5.1 The DES service level agreement should be revisited in order to adapt and streamline AEGI management systems in accordance with strategic priorities.

The respective roles and responsibilities of the Department of Education and Science, NCGE, AEGS and the VECs/WIT need to be clarified and kept under review in respect of management, planning, coordination, information provision, networking and technical support.

7.5.2 On completion of the process outlined in 7.5.1 the Advisory Group should advise on the development of a client service charter and an integrated quality assurance framework for the AEGS. This would have a dual function of streamlining service provision in accordance with agreed good practice and improving the national identity of the AEGI. As part of this process, the Advisory Group could identify areas where more consistency in service delivery is desirable. The feedback from clients gathered during this evaluation provides useful signposts, as do the findings on good practice.

7.5.3 The NCGE, VECs/WIT and the AEGS should examine their systems and processes against the composite model of good practice presented in section 5.3.2. Adjustments should be made, if necessary, to encourage AEGS to fulfill the Department of Education and Science policy goal for adult guidance - namely seamless integration with further education with a strong client-centred and target group focus.

7.5.4 The Advisory Group, in collaboration with relevant parties, should support the development of a protocol for referrals to and from the AEGS i.e. into and from the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, community groups, etc. and from AEGS to other guidance, educational, vocational or psychological services. This would prevent unnecessary duplication and guarantee an integrated service for adults.

7.5.5 AEGS and the VECs/WIT should take steps to encourage adults re-entering education to engage with the guidance service prior to finalising course decisions.

7.5.6 The NCGE and the AEGI should make an input into the annual conference of the IVEA, or other equivalent gatherings where senior management of the VECs/WIT can be accessed.

7.5.7 The AEGS should examine ways to make better use of distance learning techniques (in a guidance context), after an initial personal contact has been made with clients. This could include, for example, video conferencing, telephone help lines, on line/email support and so forth.

7.5.8 The advisory group should keep under review ways that the AEGS can continue to provide a comprehensive vocational and educational guidance service to adult learners. Where appropriate, vocationally focused elements, (e.g. CV and interview preparation) and links to other locally available services should be facilitated.

7.5.9 The Department of Education and Science should consider the current membership composition of the Advisory Group to reflect ongoing priorities in lifelong learning. The development of consultations or time/issue specific subcommittees should be continued.

7.5.10 The Department of Education and Science and NCGE, should explore with the VECs/WIT, ways in which the effectiveness of the AEGS can be maximised and duplication of guidance services for adult learners can be avoided.

7.5.11 REGSA, the Waterford AEGS (currently located at the Waterford Institute of Technology), should develop a strategy in consultation with the Department of Education and Science to strengthen their links with Waterford City VEC with a view to enhancing their fit with the national identity of the AEGS and maximising their penetration to all the designated target groups.

7.6 Continuous Professional Development

7.6.1 All Guidance Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors should ensure that they attend regular caseload supervision sessions (to support one-to-one guidance with clients) with an appropriately qualified supervisor.

7.6.2 The Department of Education and Science should recommend to the VECs/WIT that an AEGS training model be adopted whereby staff is allocated a number of in-service training days per annum.

7.6.3 Guidance Coordinators should work with Information Officers to develop the information role, explore opportunities for professional development within the role and ensure the best use of their briefing, information gathering and data analysis skills.

7.7 Data Gathering and Analysis

7.7.1 The Advisory Group/AEGI should examine the data gathered currently in terms of monitoring, evaluation and practice feedback requirements. (See discussion in Section 5.5) Any gaps should be addressed and any data that overlap or do not provide useful and usable information should no longer be gathered. The aim of the exercise should be to streamline the data system with a view to improving data utility.

7.7.2 The AEGI should analyse data (using descriptive statistics, i.e. percentages, means etc) that speak to its objectives (e.g. target group take-up, guidance hours by target group etc) on a regular (quarterly) basis in the form of a short report so that trends can be examined and action taken if necessary. These reports should be presented to the Advisory Group and disseminated to guidance services and the VECs/WIT or made available on NCGE website.

7.7.3 In terms of the database content, the 'other' category should be broken down into significant non-target group categories (employed, asylum seeker etc).

7.7.4 The AEGI should ensure that entry and post guidance destination status information is gathered from all 'pre-entry' guidance clients. This should comprise a follow-up telephone survey of a representative sample of these clients six months to one year after the final guidance interview conducted by the Information Officer.

Appendix One - AEGI National Advisory Group - 2008

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National Centre for Guidance in Education

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Department of Education & Science

Ms Niamh Mernagh, Senior Inspector
Department of Education & Science

Ms. Helen Keogh, National VTOS Coordinator
Department of Education & Science

Mr. Peter Nolan, Enterprise & Employment Coordinator
Dublin Inner City Partnership
Representing the Local Employment Service (LES)

Ms. Bernie Brady, Director
AONTAS the Irish National Association of Adult Education

Ms. Caroline Duffy, Guidance Coordinator
Tallaght Adult Educational Guidance Service
Representing the Institute of Guidance Counsellors

Ms Andrea McCarthy, Guidance Coordinator
City of Cork Adult Guidance Service
Representing Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland

Mr. John Stewart, Acting Director
National Adult Literacy Association

Mr. Rodger Curran, Chief Executive Officer
Co. Kilkenny VEC
Representing the Irish Vocational Education Association

Mr Vincent Ahern, AEO, Co Cork VEC
Representing Adult Education Officers Association

Mr. Brian Mooney,
Education Finance Board

Ms Sarah McNerney
Employment Services Support Unit, FÁS

Ms. Siobhan Masterson, Assistant Director for Enterprise Policy,
Irish Business Employers Confederation

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative
National Centre for Guidance in Education

Ms Ann O'Brien, Director of Access
NUI Maynooth
Representing Access Made Accessible (AMA)

Ms Jennifer McKenzie National Coordinator, AEGI
National Centre for Guidance in Education

Ursula Kearney Guidance Officer,
National Centre for Guidance in Education

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative
National Centre for Guidance in Education

APPENDIX 2

Table 3 – CSO Small Area Statistics – 2006 Data

Persons aged 15 and over Classified by Age Education Ceased and Adult Unemployment by VEC Area

VEC Area	Left School before Upper Secondary (age 16 or under) ³²	% Early school leavers in VEC area	Unemployed aged 15 or over	% Unemployed in VEC area	Ratio Guidance Staff to adults who left school early	N Guidance Staff	Population aged over 15 3,375,399	% of Total Population
Carlow	10,350	26%	1,872	4.7%	1:6,900	1.5	39,779	1.17%
Cavan	15,447	31%	2,073	4.2%	1:15,447	1	49,751	1.4%
Clare	19,205	22%	3,470	3.9%	1:9,602	2*	86,977	2.5%
Cork City	26,170	26%	5,317	5.2%	1:13,085	2*	101,254	3%
Cork Co	65,713	23%	8,646	3.0%	1:65,713	1*	283,014	8.3%
Donegal	44,131	39%	7,265	6.3%	1:14,710	3*	113,838	3.4%
Dublin City	107,278	25%	24,577	5.7%	1:19,505	5.5	430,357	13%
Co Dublin	0		0				0	0
Fingal	33,752	18%	7,927	4.2%	1:16,876	2	187,018	5.5%
South/West Dublin	47,543	25%	9,988	5.1%	1:9,508	5	193,355	6%
Dun Laoghaire	22,774	14%	4,258	2.7%	1:11,534	2	158,794	5%
Galway City	8,003	13%	3,251	5.3%	1:4,000	2	61,264	1.8%
Co Galway	32,211	26%	4,965	4.0%	1:16,105	2	124,360	3.7%
Kerry	30,201	27%	4,842	4.3%	1:15,100	2	112,587	3.3%
Kildare	30,587	21%	5,030	3.5%	1:15,293	2*	143,326	4.2%
Kilkenny	19,209	28%	2,786	4.0%	1:12,806	1.5*	68,705	2%
Laois	13,653	26%	1,949	3.7%	1:13,653	1	51,895	1.5%
Leitrim	6,872	30%	948	4.1%		n/a	23,052	0.6%
Limerick City	13,259	31%	2,967	6.8%	1:6,629	2*	43,168	1.3%
Co Limerick	23,750	23%	3,739	3.6%	1:23,750	1	104,944	3%

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative
National Centre for Guidance in Education

APPENDIX 2

Table 3 Ctd. - CSO Small Area Statistics – 2006 Data

Persons aged 15 and over Classified by Age Education Ceased and Adult Unemployment by VEC Area

Longford	7,454	28%	1,604	5.9%	1:7,454	1*	26,928	0.8%
Louth	26,921	31%	5,092	5.9%		n/a	86,699	2.6%
Mayo	28,918	29%	4,466	4.5%	1:14,459	2*	98,430	2.9%
Meath	30,817	25%	4,637	3.7%	1:30,817	1*	124,681	3.7%
Monaghan	14,973	34%	1,717	3.9%	1:14,973	1*	44,128	1.3%
Offaly	16,104	29%	2,409	4.4%	1:16,104	1	54,911	1.6%
Roscommon	13,866	29%	1,385	2.9%	1:13,866	1	46,791	1.4%
Sligo	12,401	25%	1,832	3.7%	1:4,749	1.5*	48,972	1.5%
Tipperary (Nth)	13,572	26%	1,997	3.8%	1:13,572	1	51,921	1.5%
Tipperary (Sth)	19,429	29%	2,859	4.3%	1:19,424	1	65,693	1.9%
Waterford City	10,091	27%	2,406	6.5%			36,970	1.1%
Co Waterford	14,195	29%	2,042	4.2%	1:3,570	2	48,574	1.4%
Westmeath	14,843	24%	2,604	4.2%	1:14,843	1	61,695	1.8%
Wexford	35,003	34%	4,754	4.6%	1:35,003	1	102,511	3.0%
Wicklow	23,622	24%	4,410	4.4%	1:11,811	2	99,057	2.9%
Total	852,317		150,084				3,375,399	100%

*Approval for Additional Counsellor in 2006

APPENDIX 3

Circular Letter 70/04

Pay and Conditions for Adult Education Guidance Counsellors Adult Education Guidance Coordinators

1. Background

The White Paper on Adult Education, 'Learning for Life', sets out proposals for the development of an adult educational guidance service to support participants in VTOS, adult literacy and adult and community education programmes. Funds for this have been earmarked as part of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, with the aim of having a comprehensive service in place by 2006. Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the project have been approved and there is now a service operating in 25 areas.

A structure for the employment of the Adult Education Guidance Counsellors and Adult Education Guidance Coordinators, covering recruitment, and pay and conditions, as set out below, has been devised.

2. Recruitment

Appointments to the position of Adult Education Guidance Counsellor and Adult Education Guidance Coordinator will be made by the Vocational Education Committees, where the VEC is the sponsor of the initiative, or Institute of Technology, where appropriate.

Where an adult guidance service involves the management of staff, the promotion of outreach, the supervision of quality standards, the evaluation of the service, and guidance and counselling, this role will be deemed to be that of an Adult Education Guidance Coordinator.

In cases where the guidance counselling function is operated without such supervision and management duties, the person in question should be employed as an Adult Education Guidance Counsellor.

Within the VEC sector, suitability for appointment will be determined by means of an interview conducted by a selection board composed of

- 1 VEC representative (to be a member of a VEC)
- One CEO or nominee

- One representative with expertise in the sphere of adult /community education or guidance
- One adult guidance professional.

Such boards should pay particular attention to candidates' expertise in Adult and Community Education and Guidance.

In other cases, it is recommended that the interview board should include at least one representative of the management structure, one adult guidance professional and one representative of the broader sphere of educational, guidance or community interests.

Where the service is already managed by an Adult Education Guidance Coordinator, and additional staff are being recruited, the Coordinator should be a member of the interview board.

3. *Qualifications and Experience*

To be eligible for employment as an Adult Education Guidance Counsellor or Adult Education Guidance Coordinator, applicants must hold one of the following :-

- A post graduate diploma in Careers Guidance or Careers Guidance and Counselling or
- A Masters of Education (Guidance) or
- A Master of Science in Counselling

or

equivalent post graduate qualification recognised by the Irish Association of Counsellors and Therapists or the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.

Experience in the field of education or training, youth work, community development or social science, or a teaching qualification as specified under Memo V7 and/or Circular 32/92, is also desirable. Where the area includes a Gaeltacht, it will also be necessary that the Selection Board be satisfied as to the appointee's competence in the Irish language.

Other Relevant Experience - Teaching, education/training experience in adult or youth work or employment services.

4. Appointments

Successful candidates will be subject to an initial probationary period of one year. Staff already employed in Adult Education Guidance Projects, which have received a Service Agreement covering the period up to 2006, will be deemed to have satisfactorily completed the probationary period, provided they have been employed in the project for at least one year.

Those with qualifications reckonable for recognition as teaching qualifications under Memo V7 or Circular 32/92 may be awarded permanent posts on satisfactory completion of the probationary period, provided the adult guidance project has received a service agreement covering the period up to 2006.

In other cases, and subject to the project operating satisfactorily, a fixed purpose contract may be awarded following successful completion of probation i.e. employment will be continued subject to

- (a) the continued operation of the Adult Education Guidance Initiative;
- and
- (b) the scale of the Adult Education Guidance programme approved in the area being continued.

In the event of an Adult Education Guidance programme which has been operating satisfactorily for a period in excess of 3 years no longer being required in a scheme, the issue will be the subject of national discussions between the Department, IVEA and TUI.

5. Salary Scale -- Adult Education Guidance Counsellors

Scale Point	Salary Scale at 01.10.02 (including ¼ benchmarking) €	Salary Scale w.e.f. 01.01.04 €	Revised Salary Scale w.e.f. 01.07.04 €
1	32,205	35,259	35,964
2	33,334	36,495	37,225
3	34,461	37,730	38,484
4	35,587	38,963	39,741
5	36,713	40,196	40,999
6	37,842	41,432	42,260
7	38,968	42,665	43,517
8	40,096	43,899	44,777
9	41,222	45,132	46,035
10	42,350	46,366	47,294
11	43,477	47,600	48,553
12	44,766	49,012	49,992
13	46,376	50,773	51,788

6. Qualification allowances

Qualification allowances will apply as per the allowances payable to teachers, updated as appropriate by subsequent pay increases, subject to a maximum rate being paid equal to a primary degree (pass or honours) plus a Higher Diploma in Education (pass), as specified from time to time in Department circulars.

7. Allowance for Coordination Duties

Adult Education Guidance Coordinator	1.10.02 €	1.1.04 €	1.07.04 €
+ 1 information officer or Guidance Counsellor (1 staff)	2,810	2,894	2,952
AEGC + 2-3 staff	3,676	3,787	3,863
AEGC + 4-5 staff	4,862	5,008	5,108
AEGC + 6-7 staff	6,090	6,273	6,398

A coordination allowance as shown above will apply when the Guidance Counsellor is responsible for the day to day management of the service, including supervision of Information Staff and/or other Guidance

Counsellors, and for planning and evaluation of the service as deputed by the management structure.

8. Placement on Salary Scale

New appointees will be placed on the first point of the salary scale. Staff within the teaching service or Youthreach/Traveller service or other relevant public sector education or training or community services who transfer to the post of Adult Education Guidance Counsellor may be placed on the AEGC scale at a salary point immediately above the rate of basic salary which applied prior to the transfer.

Adult Education Guidance Counsellors currently serving in projects will be assimilated on to the new scale with effect from 1 September 2002.

9. Hours of Attendance

Adult Education Guidance Counsellors should work for 35 hours per week. Attendance should be at such times as necessary for the delivery of the Adult Educational Guidance Service. Attendance outside of normal hours will be by prior agreement with the CEO/EO/AEO of the VEC, (or the project managing authority in other cases) and will be offset against normal hours attendance. Where at least 25% of annual attendance time is outside of normal hours, an additional three days annual leave will be allowed in the year in question.

10. Superannuation

Where staff are in the employment of the VEC or an IOT, service will be pensionable under the conditions set out in the relevant Superannuation Scheme for the sector.

11. Annual Leave/Sick Leave

Adult Education Guidance Counsellors shall have 30 days annual leave, excluding public holidays. Sick Leave arrangements will provide for full pay for certified sick leave up to a maximum of six months in one year, (or 183 days), followed by half-pay thereafter for a maximum of twelve months total sick leave (or 365 days) in any period of 4 years or less. Paid sick leave for absences for minor uncertified indispositions may be allowed up to a maximum of 7 days in a year, provided that absences exceeding 3 consecutive days are medically certified.

12. *Travel and Subsistence Allowances*

Allowances in respect of travelling and subsistence will be payable in respect of approved journeys on Adult Education Guidance business at rates not greater than those sanctioned by the Minister for Education and Science from time to time.

13. *Duties of Adult Education Guidance Counsellors*

The duties of the post will include, under the direction of the Adult Education Guidance Coordinator or CEO/EO/AEO of the VEC, (or the direction of the management structure for the community service or Institute of Technology in other cases) and in accordance with the overall plan for the service approved by the Adult Education Board:

- to provide guidance, counselling and information services to individual clients and to groups, and provide referral services to other agencies as appropriate
- to provide support and advice in the field of guidance and counselling to staff in Further Education centres, and support the development of an integrated curriculum of learning, guidance and progression
- to broker services with educational bodies and other institutions as emerging client needs are identified
- to share good practice from the sector and supporting the mainstreaming of relevant lessons into national policy and practice
- to act in a representative capacity if required on matters relating to adult educational guidance
- to assist in the management of resources, e.g. financial, premises, materials, personnel etc as appropriate, relevant to the needs of the local programme
- to keep records and prepare reports and submissions in consultation with the Adult Education Guidance Coordinator or CEO/EO/AEO as appropriate
- any other duties appropriate to the needs of the local scheme as may be assigned by the Adult Education Guidance Coordinator or CEO/EO/AEO for the effective and efficient management of resources.

14. Additional Duties of Adult Education Guidance Coordinator

The Adult Education Guidance Coordinator will have the following additional functions, under the direction of the CEO/EO/AEO of the VEC, (or the direction of the management structure for the community service or Institute of Technology in other cases) and in accordance with the overall plan for the service approved by the Adult Education Board

- to coordinate the day to day operation of the Adult Guidance Service, including planning, supervision of staff, management of premises and resources, and maintenance of records,
- to support staff development, supervise guidance information services and staff, establishing quality standards and guidelines in line with national practice for the initiative,
- to provide an outreach service to adult education centres in the catchment area
- to market and promote the guidance service, including the development of promotional materials
- to develop appropriate networks and partnerships with local agencies in the field of education, training, welfare and community services
- to monitor the service, reporting to the CEO/EO/AEO (or community or other management structure as appropriate) on developments and provision, and informing the work of relevant national agencies.

15. Requirement to Obtain Appropriate Qualifications

For those employed in the existing service as Coordinators who do not have a guidance and counselling qualification, employment may be continued subject to the condition that the appropriate qualifications are obtained within a five year period from the date of this circular. Permanent posts may not be granted in the interim, and the arrangement will apply only where the Department is satisfied with the operation of the overall project. The Department is prepared to consider applications towards the cost of fees for appropriate courses from persons in this category.

16. Implementation

Chief Executive Officers are requested to make arrangements to introduce the terms of this circular as soon as possible. It will be a condition of participation in the scheme that the selected candidates participate in in-service training and networks supported by the Department of Education and Science and the National Centre for Guidance in Education and/or VEC, and that the projects supported through the measure fulfil the qualitative, quantitative and financial requirements set out by the Department, the National Centre for Guidance in Education and the VEC.

Pauline Gildea
Principal Officer
24 November 2004

Circular 0015/2007 Adult Guidance Information Officers

Adult Guidance Information Officer - Job Profile

**To the Chief Executive Officer of each Vocational Education Committee/Sponsor of
Adult Guidance Projects**

Pay and Conditions for Adult Guidance Information Officers

1. Background

The White Paper on Adult Education, "Learning for Life", sets out proposals for the development of an adult educational guidance service to support participants in VTOS, adult literacy and adult and community education programmes. The service is being developed in phases as resources permit and is now available in 38 areas.

A structure for the employment of the Adult Guidance Information Officers, covering recruitment, and pay and conditions, as set out below, has been devised.

2. Recruitment

Appointments to the position of Adult Guidance Information Officer will be made by the Vocational Education Committees, where the VEC is the sponsor of the initiative, or other sponsor, as appropriate. Please see appendix attached outlining job description.

3. Qualifications

The Leaving Certificate or equivalent will be the minimum requirement.

4. Salary

The salary scale will be effective from the 1st June 2004 in the case of Information Officers who were in service on that date, or from the date of appointment, if subsequent. Retrospective payments should take account of public service increases under the terms of sustaining progress and the benchmarking process.

5. Salary Scale

The agreed salary scale for those in the post with effect from 1st June 2004 is as follows:

€24,112 - €25,868 - €27,644 - €28,967 - €30,247 - €31,972 - €33,223 - €34,490

For information, this scale updated to 1st Dec. 2006 is as follows:

€27,831 - €29,857 - €31,907 - €33,435 - €34,911 - €36,904 - €38,346 - €39,811

For the sake of equity as between currently serving officers, the scale in the case of currently serving officers will comprise two further long service increments on a personal basis as follows:

1st June 2004: LSI 1: €35,658, LSI 2: €36,832

1st Dec. 2006: LSI 1: €41,157, LSI 2: €42,511

Assimilation will be through placement on the next favourable point with effect from 1st June 2004.

Any currently serving Information Officer who is already on a higher salary than the above will retain his/her salary on a personal basis.

6. Duties of Post

These are set out in Appendix attached

7. Hours of Work

Information Officers must work for 35 hours per week. Attendance should be at times which facilitate the delivery of the Adult Guidance Service.

8. Pensions

Subject to the normal approval process applying to each post (where this has not already taken place), the pension arrangements will be the normal arrangements applying to VEC staff in the administrative structure, with similar arrangements applying where the sponsor is not a VEC.

9. Annual Leave

Annual leave will be 20 days rising to 22 days after 5 years' service, plus whatever days already apply (i.e. privilege days / closed days) to the particular VEC in which they are employed.

Any currently serving Information Officer who already has more than 20 / 22 days' leave, as set out above, will retain his/her current number of days on a personal basis.

10. Sick Leave

Sick leave arrangements will be the standard arrangements that already apply to VEC staff in the administrative structure.

11. Travel and Subsistence

Travel and subsistence arrangements will be the standard arrangements that already apply to VEC staff in the administrative structure.

12. Implementation

Chief Executive Officers or other sponsors of adult guidance projects are requested to make arrangements to introduce the terms of this circular as soon as possible. It will be a condition of participation in the scheme that the selected candidates participate in in-service training and networks supported by the Department of Education and Science and the National Centre for Guidance in Education and/or VEC, and that the projects supported through the measure fulfil the qualitative, quantitative and financial requirements set out by the Department, the National Centre for Guidance in Education and the VEC.

13. Enquiries

Please direct any queries you may have to Eileen McBrien at above address, Tel: (01) 8892009, email: Eileen_McBrien@education.gov.ie

Breda Naughton
Principal Officer
19 February 2007

Appendix to Circular 0015/2007

Adult Guidance Information Officer - Job Profile

Key Purpose

1. To implement and maintain agreed administrative procedures.
2. To develop and maintain up to date paper based and computer based systems in respect of clients, groups and information resources.
3. To develop, implement and maintain a comprehensive, up-to-date and user friendly information service which supports the aims and objectives of the project.
4. To contribute to and organize events, marketing activities, and promotional materials which promote the project to clients, groups and other agencies.
5. To contribute to the on-going development and maintenance of the service.

Accountabilities

The postholder will report to the Project Manager, Guidance Coordinator, Guidance Counsellor or Management Group as agreed in the operational framework for the project.

Responsibilities

1.0 To offer administrative support to the project including:

- 1.1 Establish recording systems and databases in agreement with the project manager
- 1.2 Implementing agreed administrative procedures.
- 1.3 Maintain client records and statistics in a confidential manner
- 1.4 Carry out day-to-day secretarial duties such as typing and word-processing, photocopying, telephone/reception, mail and minute taking.
- 1.5 Maintain day-to-day financial records including petty cash, monthly accounts, invoicing, and the purchase of equipment, as appropriate.
- 1.6 Maintain an appointments system for guidance interviews and group sessions.
- 1.7 Take responsibility for day-to-day maintenance issues relating to the building as appropriate.

2.0 To develop and maintain an up to date paper based and computer based systems in respect of clients, groups and information resources.

- 2.1 Develop and maintain paper based and ICT databases which are relevant to the adult learner including: education, training and employment opportunities, funding and support services.
- 2.2 Ensure that the client database is maintained and updated in accordance with NCGE guidelines.
- 2.3 Assist in the preparation and completion of returns to the Department of Education and Science, NCGE, VEC and other designated bodies.
- 2.4 Assist in the development, maintenance and updating of websites, as appropriate.
- 2.5 Undertake training and keep updated on relevant developments and changes in respect of the client database.
- 2.6 Access information from a range of circulation sources.
- 2.7 Keep informed of relevant ongoing developments at local and national level
- 2.8 Ensure that guidance personnel are kept updated regarding new information and changes that may affect our clients.

3.0 To develop, implement and maintain an effective and user friendly information service which supports the aims and objectives of the project.

- 3.1 Deal with public enquiries by telephone and in person from members of the public, local agencies and community groups.
- 3.2 Provide user-friendly, accurate, and relevant information and advice to enquirers.
- 3.3 Undertake research on behalf of clients, groups, and staff and prepare individualised information packs.
- 3.4 Interpret and apply information, such as grant entitlements, to individual needs.
- 3.5 Make referrals and/or arrange appointments for clients to meet with the Guidance Counsellor, other internal staff, and/or external organisations as appropriate.
- 3.6 Maintain comprehensive and up to date information on local job, education and training opportunities.

3.7 Input and maintain appropriate client records.

3.8 Maintain appropriate links with other service providers.

4.0 To contribute to and organise events, marketing activities, and promotional materials which promote the project to client, groups and other agencies.

4.1 Assist in promotional/networking activities e.g. presentations, exhibitions and events as appropriate.

4.2 Contribute to the production of publicity materials.

4.3 Undertake appropriate activities to publicise and market the services of the project to existing and new clients.

4.4 Deliver presentations and/or information sources to groups as required.

5.0 To contribute, as appropriate, to the on-going development and maintenance of the service.

5.1 Contribute to the monitoring, review and evaluation of the project by: maintaining and analysing data on client use of the service; and contributing to the identification of gaps in provision.

5.2 Keep note of possible research needs presented through trends in the client data and feed these back as appropriate to the project management.

5.3 Participate in appropriate staff development and training as agreed with line manager.

5.4 Maintain awareness of on-going developments at local and national level.

5.5 Any other duties relevant to the effective and efficient operation of the service.

APPENDIX 4

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI)

Questionnaire for completion by all Adult Education Guidance Services

Issued 1st May 2008

Confidentiality

All information will be treated as confidential in the sense that the data will be aggregated and no individuals will be identified by name or any other feature that might identify them. Individual services will only be identified in instances where good practice is being highlighted. The questionnaires will be stored in the keeping of the independent evaluators for two years and then destroyed.

Section A Profile of the service

1. In what year did your AEGI service commence? _____
2. What is the Management structure for your service, (i.e. advisory group or management team) and what organisations are represented?

3. What VEC area does your service operate in? _____
4. For 2007-8 approximately what percentage of your guidance clients were drop in? _____
5. In the same period, approximately what percentage of guidance clients were sourced through outreach? _____
6. How many clients used your information service in 2007?
7. Taking 2007 as an example, what proportion (%) of your one-to-one guidance clients came from the following groups:

Literacy _____
VTOS _____
Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) _____
Community Education _____
Other, Please describe for each category _____

_____ % _____ % _____ %

8. Approximately what proportion of your literacy clients are English as a Second Language (ESLO) clients?

Less than 5% 5-10% 11-20% 21-50% 51-75% Over 75%

Section B Good Practice

9. Please reflect on **good practice** within your every day work providing guidance to your clients. Please select an area from the headings below to describe **an example** of a way that your service works that you believe to be good practice using the set of questions in question 10 to structure your response.

Table One: Good Practice Categories	
<i>Specific actions or areas of Good Practice</i>	<i>Please tick which category your example of good practice best fits into.</i>
Innovative responses to hard to reach clients	
Networking for exchange of good practice and support	
Partnership / Integration into local community and service provision - Local networks between AEGI and other relevant services	
One-to-one guidance	
Group guidance	
Information services	
Outreach	
Resources, e.g. use of tools such as Qualifax, Career Directions	
Use of information technology, e.g. web based material, etc.	
Recording	
Tracking of client progression	
Client feedback	
Promotion of guidance as a service	
Evaluation systems including self evaluation	
Other, please specify	

10. Description of Your Example of Good Practice

Please describe your example of good practice in your work or the way in which you work. As part of the description please highlight any challenges that this way of working was designed to overcome.

10a) What are the observable impacts of this way of working on your clients?

10b) What are the benefits for you as practitioners?

10c) What are the benefits for your managing organisation, e.g. VEC or WIT?

11. Do you have quality assurance procedures for your AEGI service?

Yes No

12. If yes, please describe below:

13. If no, is this something you would like assistance with? Yes No

14. Do you use performance indicators in reflecting on/examining your service?

Yes No

15. If yes, please list the performance indicators that you use:

Section C Leadership & Professional Development

Leadership

16. Who do you look to for professional support in the event of challenges or issues arising in the course of your work?

17. Who do you look to for strategy direction/advice?

18. Who is at the helm – who do you see as your leader – please name the agency/group and/or position within it)?

Supports

19. What supports do you rely on in your everyday work? Please tick all that apply:

- NCGE
- VEC
- Peers
- External Supervisor
- IT
- Professional Bodies that you belong to, e.g. IGC, AEGAI
- Publications and resource materials,
- e.g. Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers

20. Which one of the above sources is your main form of support?

21. Do you have an external guidance supervisor (i.e. A registered counsellor) who you consult re your /cases/caseload?

Yes No

22(a) If yes, how frequently do you meet?

Every two – three weeks Monthly Every two- three months Every 4-6 months Half yearly or less

Overarching Research on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative
National Centre for Guidance in Education

22(b) How effective do you find this supervision?

Very effective b) Effective enough c) Not effective

23. How familiar are you with the National Guidance Forum Report: Guidance for LIFE An integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland?

Very familiar Somewhat familiar Not familiar

24. (a) Have you used this document in the course of your work?

Yes No

24 (b) If yes, please describe briefly what you have used the Forum Report for?

25. What are your ongoing support needs?

26. What (if any) improvements to the professional development or inservice training supports on offer would you suggest?

27. Do you think a code of professional practice for guidance with adults needs to be developed?

Yes No

28. How secure do you feel about the future operation of the AEGI service in your area?

Secure Reasonably Secure Not secure

29. What hopes do you have about your career development in the AEGI?

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National Centre for Guidance in Education

30. What suggestions, if any, do you have for career development within the AEGI? _____

31. What hopes do you have about the future of the AEGI?

32. What suggestions (if any) do you have for the future development of the AEGI?

Section D Integration and Referral

Integration with Other Services

33. How aware do you believe other adult education, training and welfare providers in your area are of your service?

- a) Very aware b) Awareness could be improved c) Not very aware

34. What (if anything) would you suggest to raise awareness of your service?

35. How well integrated do you believe your AEGI service is with other adult education services in your area?

- a) Well b) Could be improved c) Not well

36. What improvements (if any) would you suggest?

37. How well does your AEGI fit with the educational ethos of the VEC/WIT? (please tick the relevant boxes below)

	PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOUR AEGI SERVICE FITS BY TICKING THE RELEVANT BOXES		
	Fits Completely	Fits Somewhat	Does Not Fit At All
Fit with Ethos of the VEC or WIT			
Fit with planning cycle and management systems of the VEC or WIT			
Fits with the vision for service provision of the VEC or WIT			
Fits with the full complement of services provided for adult learners within the VEC or WIT			

Referral

38. What are the **top three main** sources of inward referrals to your guidance service?

1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____

39. Approximately, what percentage of your clients come from these three sources (please indicate for each source)?

Less than 5% 5-10% 11-20% 21-50% 51-75% Over 75%

1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____

40. Are there any difficulties with inward referrals?

41. If yes, please describe them_____

42. What three services/agencies do you most frequently refer clients on to:

1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____

43. Approximately, what percentage of your clients are referred on to these destinations (please indicate for each)?

Less than 5% 5-10% 11-20% 21-50% 51-75% Over 75%

1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____

44. What challenges, if any, do you encounter with onward referrals (to other agencies)?

45. Please describe any challenges encountered

46. Do you have onward referral protocols for the guidance service?

Yes No

47. If not, is this something that needs to be developed?

Yes No

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48. Do other service providers in your area have clear protocols for referring to the guidance service?

Yes No

49. If not, is this something that needs to be developed?

Yes No

Section E Final Overview

50. What in your view is/are the main gap(s) (if any) in the AEGI service as provided in your area?

51. What suggestions would you make to help fill this gap?

52. What is your vision for the future of the AEGI?

Thank-you very much for filling in the Questionnaire and contributing to the evaluation

Please be assured that all information provided will be treated as confidential (see top of questionnaire).

