



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

Overarching research on
data gathered in
DE/DFHERIS/SOLAS/NCGE
Adult Guidance
Management System
of the Adult Educational
Guidance Initiative

2004 - 2018

Compiled by Dr. Petra Elftorp on behalf of the
National Centre for Guidance in Education

December 2020



SOLAS

An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
Further Education and Training Authority



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education



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

Foreword

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) co-ordinated the supports, development and evaluations of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative on behalf of the Department of Education from 2000. This Initiative to establish a new guidance service for adults began with 8 pilot projects based within the Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) and Waterford Institute of Technology. Due to the oversight, support and funding of the Department and development of national policies, quality guidance practice and successful integration into VECs, the “AEGI Pilot projects” developed into the 37 well established Adult Educational Guidance Services, now integrated and operating within the 16 Education and Training Boards nationally.

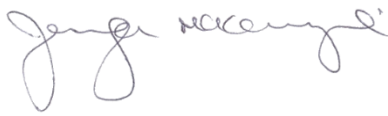
At the very core of these guidance developments has been the fundamental requirement to provide impartial guidance services, to record and gather quantitative and qualitative data nationally and the consideration, evaluation and review of these reports at national level to inform national guidance service funding and planning. This data, recorded by the professional guidance practitioners as a key component of their role, through a bespoke database, the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS), has provided evidence of guidance practice and service management, development and delivery, and has documented the outcomes for clients of accessing the guidance services since 2004. This contemporaneous reflection on guidance service practice and developments, strategic planning and the guidance needs of clients provides a unique insight into the development of a regionally based national guidance service targeted at the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised members of our communities. The data gathered reflects the impact of economic changes in Ireland on the guidance services themselves and the education, careers, and livelihoods of those clients who did not or could not follow the traditional road of school-to-college-to-work in our country.

Annual reports from the AGMS considered internally by NCGE, the National Advisory Group and Department from 2004, and subsequently by SOLAS from 2013, have been published by NCGE since 2015. This Overarching Research on Data Gathered Report commissioned by NCGE aims to provide a final report of the data within the current AGMS and inform future data gathering policies and practice for guidance services across the education and training sector. This Report completed by external guidance researcher Dr Petra Elftorp expertly explores, interprets and provides commentary and conclusions on the extensive AGMS qualitative and quantitative data gathered over the course of 14 years.

This Report contributes to the understanding of what an “adult guidance service” does and the benefits of such guidance for clients. The evidence presented is critical to informing the development of national strategies on quality guidance services thus ensuring access to impartial information and guidance for progression to all Further Education and Training and Higher Education opportunities in the context of lifelong learning.

I wish to formally acknowledge and compliment all those who have contributed to the ongoing developments of the AGMS since its inception, for contributing to the body of evidence of and for guidance practice, to inform future national policy on guidance data gathering.

Is mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer McKenzie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jennifer" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "McKenzie".

Jennifer McKenzie,

Director, NCGE

Table of Contents

Glossary.....	1
Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction and Background	5
The First Phase: 2000-2006.....	6
The Second Phase: 2007-2013	8
The Third Phase: 2013 - 2018.....	9
Methodology.....	11
AEGS Provision in Numbers	13
Total Number of Beneficiaries	13
Staffing	15
Guidance Delivery	18
One-to-one guidance meetings.....	20
Group guidance	22
General Public Queries	24
Referrals	25
Client Demographics	32
Gender.....	32
Age	33
Nationality.....	37
Target groups	38
National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels.....	45
Overall trends in the client demographic data	50
Client progression	52
Tracking Intended and Actual Progression	52
Barriers.....	54
Client Feedback.....	58
AEGS Activities	67
Outreach provision.....	67
Networking.....	68
Social Inclusion	69
Gender Equality.....	70
Developing Resources and using ICT.....	71

Marketing	72
Continuing Professional Development needs	73
Priority Planning	74
Best Practice.....	76
Developing and establishing regular professional practices.....	76
Collaboration and interagency work.....	77
Promoting the service and increasing access	78
Developing Information & Resources	78
Evaluation and practitioner research.....	79
Case Studies	80
Theme 1. Social inclusion	82
Theme 2. Collaboration	84
Theme 3. Supporting Client Progression and Learner Pathways	86
Theme 4. Employer engagement	88
Theme 5. Resources and ICT	91
Conclusions	95
References	96
Appendices.....	99
Appendix A. Adult Educational Guidance Services	100
Appendix B. Qualitative Returns Changes	101
Appendix C. Current NFQ level	103

Glossary

AEGI	Adult Educational Guidance Initiative: A DES funded initiative which provides quality educational guidance services for adults.
AEGS	Adult Educational Guidance Services: the services delivering guidance under the AEGI, managed by the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and supported by the NCGE.
AGA	Adult Guidance Association: member association for guidance practitioners working primarily with adult clients
AGMS	Adult Guidance Management System: The computerised record keeping system which was custom designed for the AEGS
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative: part-time courses for over 16s, aimed principally at those who have not completed the Leaving Certificate (or equivalent) qualification.
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
ETB	Education and Training Board: statutory authorities with responsibility for education and training, youth work, Adult Educational Guidance and a range of other FET provisions.
FÁS	An Foras Áiseanna Saothair: former Training and Employment Authority, dissolved and replaced by SOLAS in 2013.
FET	Further Education and Training: sector providing education and training at Levels 1-6 on the NFQ or equivalent.
ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education: A model of intensive tuition in adult literacy and basic education for educationally disadvantaged adults, involving 6 hours of tuition per week over a 14-week period to groups of 6 – 8 learners.
NAG	National Advisory Group: monitors guidance practice and quality and advises the DES on guidance policy.
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education: DES agency working to inform and support the development of guidance policy and practice and co-ordinate the provision of CPD in post primary schools and the FET sector.
NDP	National Development Plan: sets out the investment priorities of the Irish Government.
NFQ	National Framework of Qualification: a system of ten levels used to describe the Irish qualifications system.

PLC	Post Leaving Certificate: full-time programme for young people who have completed their Leaving Certificate and adults returning to education.
VEC	Vocational Education Committees (dissolved and replaced with ETB as part of the FET reform in 2013)
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme: second chance education and training programme which provides courses of up to two years duration for unemployed people at NFQ levels 3-6.

Executive Summary

This overarching report presents the findings from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data on the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) database, spanning 14 years, from 2004 to 2018. The data in the AGMS has been interrogated and analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

The research process has been supported by the NCGE Director and NCGE FET Guidance Programme Coordinator, as well as a research advisory group including NCGE staff and AEGS practitioners, and a representative of the Adult Guidance Association (AGA). The report provides contextual background information about the AEGI and how it has developed since it was established in 2000 and subsequently presents the findings.

Key findings from the quantitative data:

- The 39 Adult Educational Guidance Services have provided one-to-one guidance counselling, group guidance and information to a vast number of beneficiaries over the 14-year period, ranging from n24,348 to n60,943 beneficiaries per annum.
- The total number of one-to-one client meetings recorded in the AGMS for the years 2004-2018 is n400,663. Just over half (52.9%) of those clients had one meeting only, while 20.8% had 2 meetings, and 26.3% had 3 or more meetings.
- Although the number of beneficiaries increased over time, the staffing levels decreased in the same period and there was an 81% increase in terms of client to guidance counsellor/coordinator ratio, from 2006 to 2016. In addition, an increase in the number of services operating without an Adult Guidance Information Officer or with a part-time Adult Guidance Information Officer was noted in the same time period.
- The overall gender distribution was 40% male and 60% female, and the data suggests that the proportion of female clients is higher in times of high employment, and that the proportion of male clients increased during the recession with high unemployment levels, particularly in male dominated occupations such as construction.
- The age profile of one-to-one guidance clients has shifted significantly from 2004 to 2018, towards a younger age profile. Most notable is the 18-25 age band which represented the smallest client cohort in 2004 and the largest in 2018.
- It is evident from the data that the majority of clients are unemployed, as over 64% of clients are identified as either long-term unemployed, unemployed (activation priority) or not working (but ineligible for the live register).
- The AGMS allows practitioners to record clients' intended progression and their 'actual' progression (although the long-term progression is not frequently tracked). Overall, the client progression data suggests that guidance provision has a positive impact in terms of encouraging adults to engage in education.

The AGMS allows services to record client feedback and whilst the number of client feedback returns has decreased in recent years (primarily due to the resources required to gather client feedback), the key findings to emerge include:

- Over 95% of clients are happy with the support they received.
- 78.1% took action as a result of the guidance session they attended
- The qualitative data highlighted that the guidance provision is welcoming, impartial, non-judgemental and genuine.
- In terms of improvements of services, more suitable premises and more visibility of the services were two of the main suggestions put forward by clients.

Key findings from the qualitative data:

Qualitative data has been recorded on a quarterly and/or biannual basis, in relation to some of the key guidance activities, including: Outreach provision; Networking; Social Inclusion; Gender Equality; Developing Resources and using ICT; Marketing; Continuing Professional Development needs; and Priority Planning. In particular, the data provides evidence that networking is an essential part of the AEGS. However, some services have had to limit their networking activities due to underfunding and/or understaffing.

Services also outline examples of ‘best practice’ in relation to collaborations and interagency work, promotion of services, development of resources and information, and evaluations and practitioner research. Furthermore, a total of n286 case studies have been recorded in the AGMS in the time period from 2013 to 2018. The case studies provide in-depth and contextual examples of practices and a thematic analysis approach yielded the five themes: Social inclusion; Collaboration; Supporting Client Progression and Learner Pathways; Employer engagement; and Resources and ICT. A total of 10 case studies are provided within this report.

A number of challenges and outcomes of guidance provision were also identified and some of the most prominent challenges relate to staffing shortages, barriers for client progression and access to external referral services. Meanwhile, outcomes of guidance provision can be summarised as: increased client self-confidence; increased access and engagement in education; AEGS input into FET provision; and strengthened relationships between the AEGS and other services.

Conclusions from the findings can be found at the end of this report.

Introduction and Background

In 2019, the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) established a stakeholder working group to examine the potential developments and future planning of the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) for the wider guidance service provision across the Further Education and Training (FET) sector within the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) nationally.

The AGMS was developed by NCGE, from 2004 to 2013, on behalf of the Department of Education and Science at that time, to ensure accurate national data-gathering on the provision of guidance services in the then pilot projects of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI).

Since 2013, SOLAS has funded the continued NCGE management and co-ordination of the AGMS to gather data on the provision of the Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) within the 16 ETBs nationally. Following the establishment of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Ireland Data Protection Act, 2018 all current and future data gathering systems would be required to ensure compliance with GDPR.

To inform the planning of GDPR compliant future data gathering and to provide a final report of all of the data within the current AGMS, NCGE commissioned this overarching report to explore, consider and analyse the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from 2004 to 2018.

The main objectives of this overarching research report are to:

- generate an overarching overview report of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered on the current Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) AGMS database from 2004-2018
- include a report on the documented Case Studies provided as required within the AGMS since 2013

In relation to the scope of this research, it is important to emphasise that it does *not* provide an evaluation of the Adult Educational Guidance Services or the ETBs nationally, nor does it provide an evaluation of the AGMS. However, the research will inform the final completion, close-off and archiving of the NCGE AGMS system. Conclusions

This research may also inform developments and data-gathering in any future FET Guidance Management System. The quantitative and qualitative data involves both non-personal client statistical data and service reports generated by 39 AEGS nationally over 14 years.

Background

This section provides some context and background to the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI), the Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) and the client and service data management system designed and developed for the services by NCGE, namely the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS).

Whilst these developments have been divided into three phases in this report that does not imply that they were distinguished as such in practice.

The First Phase: 2000-2006

The need for adult guidance counselling in Ireland was formally identified in the Green Paper (DES 1999), and subsequently also in the White Paper: *Learning for Life* (DES 2000). A recognition was starting to emerge in Europe at that time, of the importance of 'lifelong guidance' as part of the Lifelong Learning paradigm (Cedefop 2008).

In 2000, the Department of Education and Science (DES) established the AEGI to provide adult educational guidance services, established initially as pilot projects in Adult Literacy, VTOS, Adult and Community Education, and was funded by the National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006. The number of services based within the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and beneficiaries grew significantly during this pilot phase. As there was no similar model within the education sector in Ireland to build on and no other models identified in other countries at that time, it was referred to as an 'Initiative'. NCGE was given the lead role in managing, co-ordinating and supporting the development of the AEGI and to chair the multiagency National Advisory Group (NAG), on behalf of the Department, which was crucial to the development of the initiative. The first NAG was appointed by the DES in 1999 and was in place throughout the pilot and evaluations phases of the AEGS until 2012.

The NAG met quarterly to review the reports of the AEGS and consider planning and advice for the VECs and WIT on the continued development of the services.

The AEGI model

In relation to outcomes of the NAG, the following framework, and integrated model of adult educational guidance counselling for the AEGI was agreed on. This has remained in place, as confirmed in the 2012 DES Operational Guidelines and includes provision 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
- based within the VECs/other managing providers

Some of the key principles guiding the AEGI included that the guidance provision was free of charge, impartial, confidential and integrated in the adult education sector (National Guidance Forum 2007).

Two key DES circulars (70/04 and 0015/2007) clarified both the staffing roles within the AEGS and the management reporting structures for the services. The Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of the VEC/WIT were given responsibility for the AEGS as part of their overall responsibilities for adult education and further education and training activities. The Circular stated that the Adult Educational Guidance Coordinator, reporting to the CEO or Education Officer (EO) or Adult Education Officer (AEO) was designated duties of "*co-ordinating the day to day operation of the Adult Educational Guidance Service, including planning, supervision of staff, management of premises and resources, and maintenance of records*"...and "*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”.

Another key principle of the initiative was quality standards which involved the mandatory completion of quantitative and qualitative reports and the sharing of information and ideas across the services (National Guidance Forum 2007). This practice has been encouraged and facilitated by the NCGE on a continuous basis and lead to the development of the AGMS.

An Emerging Management System

Throughout the Pilot phase of the AEGI, the individual Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) based within the VECs/ WIT services were required, as a condition of funding, to complete paper – based reports for NCGE, with the necessary quantitative and qualitative data on guidance service provision, to inform the DES on regional and national planning of the AEGI. NCGE collated these paper-based reports to provide quarterly reports to the NAG for consideration, discussion and recommendations to the Department

In 2003, staff members of the AEGS pilot projects participated in an initial pilot working group in 2003, chaired by the NCGE, where they deliberated and advised on the developments of a database system to provide these reports. NCGE contracted the services of an external service provider to work with NCGE and the pilot project AEGS to develop an online data management system to respond to the requirements of all the stakeholders involved. As such, the Adult Guidance Management System (AGMS) has enabled services to provide feedback to all the stakeholders on the extent and nature of the guidance services provided.

The AGMS was established as an online database and client management system in 2004 and has been coordinated by the NCGE since (National Guidance Forum 2007). NCGE’s role included the provision of induction and in-service training, resource materials and quality guidelines for staff, as well as the monitoring and coordination of the evaluation of the AEGS nationally. A number of developments and changes to the AGMS were informed by AEGS and VEC staff and facilitated by the NCGE during the years 2004-2013.

Adult Educational Guidance Services

There are 39 AEGS services listed in the AGMS. Initially, 38 of the services were based in 32 VECs nationally, and one service was located in WIT. However, since the FET reform, with the establishment of SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETB) in 2013, the AEGS have been located within, and managed under the 16 ETBs and the responsibility of funding the adult guidance activities in the FET sector lies with SOLAS. Appendix A. illustrates how the original AEGS are situated within their respective ETBs.

Evaluation

External monitoring and evaluation of the Pilot phases were co-ordinated by NCGE and carried out by Bob Bissell from Glasgow Caledonian University. The DES Adult Guidance Inspectorate also conducted regular inspection visits of the projects. As the first pilot phase of AEGI ended in 2006, the template and role of the services was outlined in an internal report to the AEGI National Advisory Group.

The Second Phase: 2007-2013

In 2010, an overarching evaluative report was published, which focused on the first phase of the AEGI (2000-2006) (Philips and Eustace/NCGE 2010). It was concluded that the initial phase of the AEGI had been comprehensively evaluated on a continuous basis since its inception, and that *“the emphasis from now on should be on quality assurance, benchmarking and self-evaluation”* (Philips and Eustace/NCGE 2010, p.64).

Stakeholders agreed that whilst the AEGI should be *“seamlessly integrated with adult/further educational activity”*, they should maintain *“a learner-centred and non-directive focus”* (Philips and Eustace/NCGE 2010, p.61).

A second NAG was appointed by the DES in 2007 and it continued to advise the NCGE and the DES in relation to AEGI developments. The NAG was in place throughout the period of funding which was allocated from the National Development Plan 2007-2013.

The role of the AEGI National Advisory Group for the period 2007-2013 was outlined by the DES as follows:

- to advise on continued development and management of 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 AEGI
- to review and evaluate relevant AEGI reports
- 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 AEGI National Advisory Group convened up to three times per year and agencies and organisations represented in the Group included:

- DES
- NCGE
- Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA)
- Adult Education Officers' Association
- Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland
- NALA
- Institute of Guidance Counsellors
- Dept of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA)

- FÁS
- Local Employment Services
- AONTAS
- IBEC
- Access Officers' Association
- Education Finance Board

This phase of the AEGI coincided with some important contextual issues, including a global financial crisis and economic recession in 2008 and related policy measures, such as a moratorium (introduced in 2009) on the recruitment of all public service staff, including AEGS staff.

High unemployment levels during this second phase led to a significant increase in FET provision and it is evident from the findings in this report that it impacted the AEGS provision in terms of the number of adults accessing the services (see *AEGI provision in numbers*).

The Third Phase: 2013 - 2018

The third phase saw some considerable change both in terms of moving from an economic recession to an upturn, and in relation to a sectoral reform.

What is now referred to as the Further Education & Training (FET) sector, was considered dispersed and ill-defined. The Irish Government initiated a number of changes and structural reforms which started in 2013 with the introduction of new legislation (such as the Further Education and Training Act 2013 and the Education and Training Boards Act 2013) and the establishment of SOLAS, the new FET authority. SOLAS developed and published the first FET Strategy (2014-2019). NCGE collaborated with SOLAS on the development of *Section 10: Guidance and FET*, in which the AEGI was identified as the '*building block*' for future FET guidance services. The AEGI funding now came from SOLAS as opposed to the DES National Development Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF) as per the first two phases (2000-2013).

One of the most significant changes and challenges noted by the AEGS involved the amalgamation of the 33 Vocational Education Committees (VEC) into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETB). During the first years of the FET reform, some qualitative comments in the AGMS highlighted that guidance staff dedicated considerable time to attending meetings within their ETBs, with implications for the guidance delivery.

During this time period, the moratorium on recruitment on all public service staff, whereby retired staff, or those on maternity leave were not replaced, was still in place. However, there was great demand for guidance services during the recession which saw high unemployment rates. Some ETBs contracted guidance counsellors on an hourly basis in order to meet the needs in their communities. In this context, the AEGI National Advisory Group stressed in 2013 that the *DES 2012 Operational Guidelines* must remain in place.

Since 2013, no significant technological developments have been implemented in the AGMS. However, the NCGE has been funded by SOLAS since 2014 to manage and coordinate the AGMS.

In 2017 DES confirmed that NCGE would begin developments of the AGMS to widen the use for FET guidance services in the ETBs, to support planning, take account of GDPR legislation and to provide more appropriate local reports for ETBs and national reports for SOLAS. To support and prepare for this work, NCGE began discussions with ETBs to develop GDPR Agreements for the current AGMS. NCGE worked with the external service provider to ensure that, pending the development of a new system, that ETB senior management could view and consider the relevant reports of the AEGS within its ETB.

In 2019, NCGE began engagement with all relevant stakeholders on the revision and development of the AGMS in the context of national FET guidance developments. The development of a new FET Guidance Management System would be informed by an overarching review and report of the current AGMS.

Methodology

This overarching research has involved an interrogation of the data in the AGMS and whilst relevant additional documentation has been reviewed, no other primary data has been collected in the field. However, the process has been supported by the NCGE FET Guidance Programme Coordinator and by a research advisory group including NCGE staff and AEGS practitioners, and a representative of the Adult Guidance Association (AGA).

The remit of this research has been to review both quantitative and qualitative data in the AGMS for the years 2004 to 2018. Quantitative data has been generated primarily from guidance activities and client data as the AGMS has been a tool for practitioners in keeping accurate records of one-to-one and group meetings, general public enquiries and tracking progression of clients for example.

Meanwhile, the purpose of the qualitative data gathering, according to the *Guidelines for Completing the Qualitative Reports* (NCGE 2012) are threefold:

- 1. Reporting and accountability** – The AGMS provides a structure for services, allowing them to produce evidence of quality client work, collaborative practice as well as peer learning and sharing. Thus, services can be accountable and highlight best practice guidance provision for adults.
- 2. Self-evaluation** – Guidance practitioners draw on their education, skills and experiences to inform their work, and by documenting effective practice it provides an opportunity to reflect further on their work. This also allows for peer sharing and peer learning, as the NCGE publish executive summaries of the qualitative reports annually.
- 3. A team approach** – By asking each service to reflect on and report on their work qualitatively, it is bringing together the ‘voices’ of the whole guidance team, i.e. Adult Education Guidance Co-ordinator (AEG Co-ordinator), Adult Education Guidance Counsellor(s) (AEGC) and Adult Guidance Information Officer (IO), as well as the client voice through client feedback reports.

The qualitative reports were submitted on a quarterly basis from 2004 to 2010, and on a biannual basis from 2011-2018. A total of four different versions of the Qualitative Returns have been identified during the 2004-2018 time period, and the changes are outlined in *Appendix B. Qualitative Returns Changes*. The response rate to the qualitative returns appear to have gradually decreased, from 38 of 39 services in 2012, to 22 of 39 services in 2018 completing and submitting the returns. However, there is a level of uncertainty in terms of these submissions as some AEGS under the same ETB may have submitted a collective response rather than individual ones since the amalgamation of VEC’s to ETBs in 2013. This research has also involved reviewing the Case Studies within the AGMS which have been recorded since 2013.

Descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data has been performed and the findings are presented in tables and charts, whilst content and thematic analysis methods have been used to explore the qualitative data.

As one of the key objectives of the AGMS has been to support practitioners in their work with clients, it was considered important to have a system in place where the data was not ‘locked’ at the end of the year. Instead, the system is ‘live’ whereby practitioners can add and change client data when appropriate. Whilst this type of system provides the required flexibility for practitioners in their day-

to-day work, reporting on the data retrospectively is somewhat compromised in terms of reliability as it means that the findings reported here, will differ marginally to the figures reported in the annual reports produced by the NCGE.

Again, the aim of this research is not to evaluate the AEGS or the AGMS, or to make specific recommendations. Nonetheless, a number of emerging themes and trends may inform the relevant stakeholders in the process of developing FET guidance services and data collection tool.

The findings are reported under a number of headings:

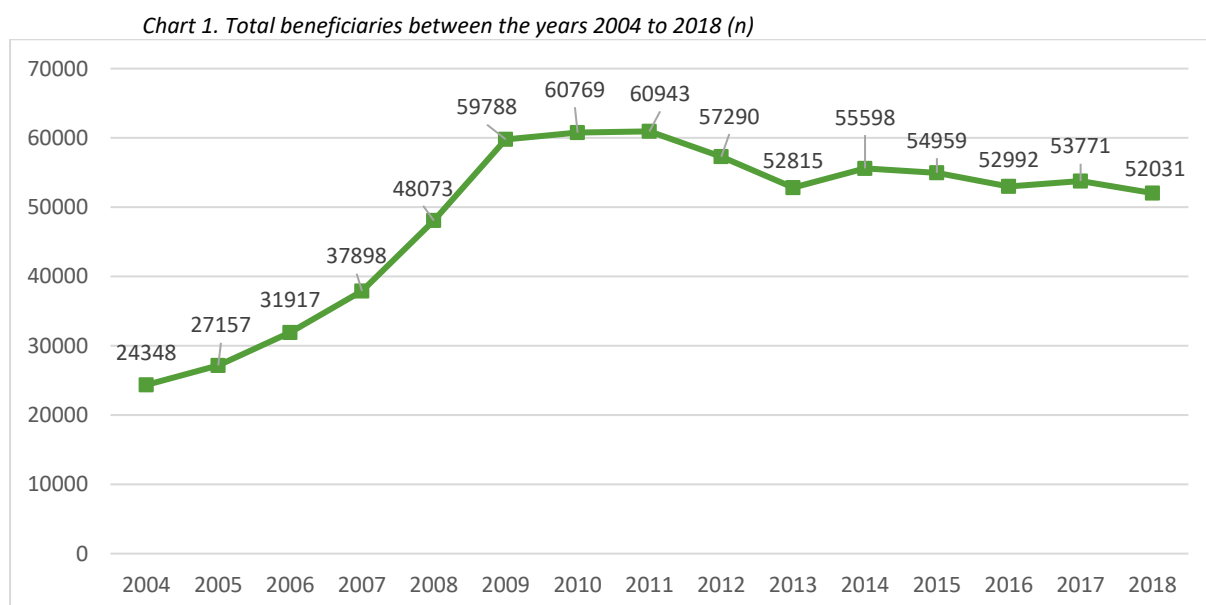
- AEGS provision in numbers
- Client Demographics
- Client Progression
- Client Feedback
- AEGS Activities
- Continuing Professional Development Needs
- Best Practice
- Case Studies

AEGS Provision in Numbers

To set the context for the subsequent findings, a number of quantitative findings demonstrating the extent of the AEGS provision are reported, including the number of beneficiaries for the AEGS, staffing levels, the types of delivery (including one-to-one guidance, group guidance and general public enquiries) and referrals.

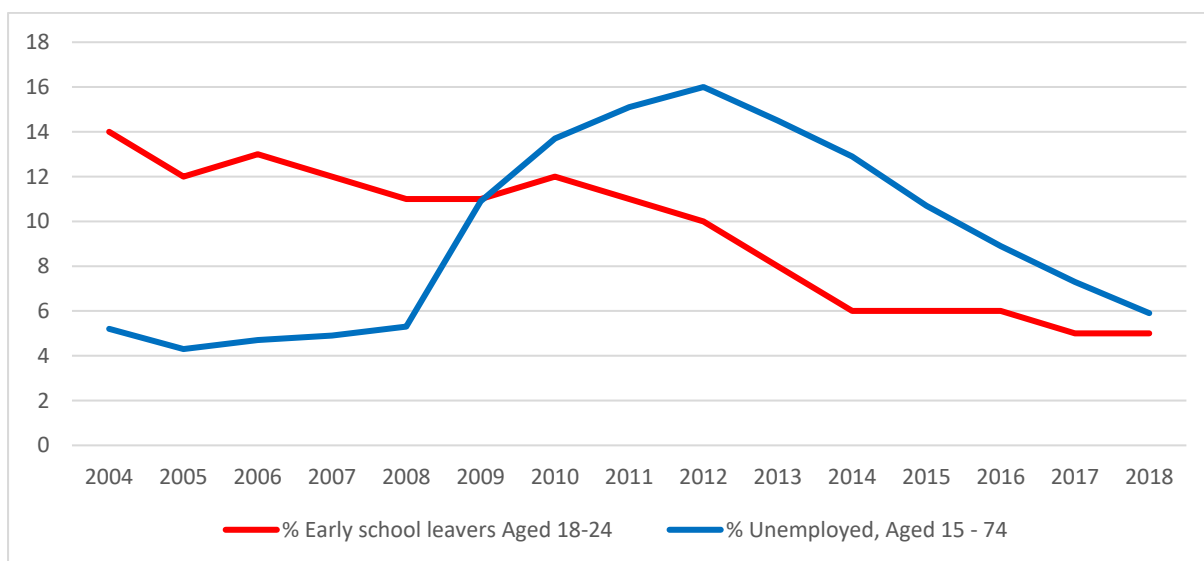
Total Number of Beneficiaries

The total number of beneficiaries are presented in Chart 1, which includes individuals receiving one-to-one guidance counselling, group guidance as well as general public queries. It is evident that the number of beneficiaries increased significantly during the first phase of the AEGI (2000-2006), and the start of the second phase (2007-2009) as the figures increased by 150% (n24,348 in 2004 to n60,769 in 2009). Thereafter, there has been less significant changes in the numbers, although they have decreased gradually and the most recent year in this report recorded n52,031 beneficiaries.



To provide some further context, the number of early school leavers aged 18-24 and unemployed, aged 15-74, for the same years are presented in Chart 2. The shape of the unemployment curve in Chart 2 correlates somewhat with the total number of beneficiaries for the years 2006-2012. However, the total number of beneficiaries during the 2012-2018 period has been relatively stable, whereas the proportion of early school leavers and unemployed have both declined significantly in the same period.

Chart 2. Early school leavers and Unemployment levels in the General Population (Source: CSO Statbank)



The total number of beneficiaries for the years 2004-2018 under each ETB are also presented in Chart 3 and in Table 1. See *Appendix A* where the original services are organised under the ETBs presented in the chart and table.

Chart 3. Total Beneficiaries by ETB (2004-2018) (n)

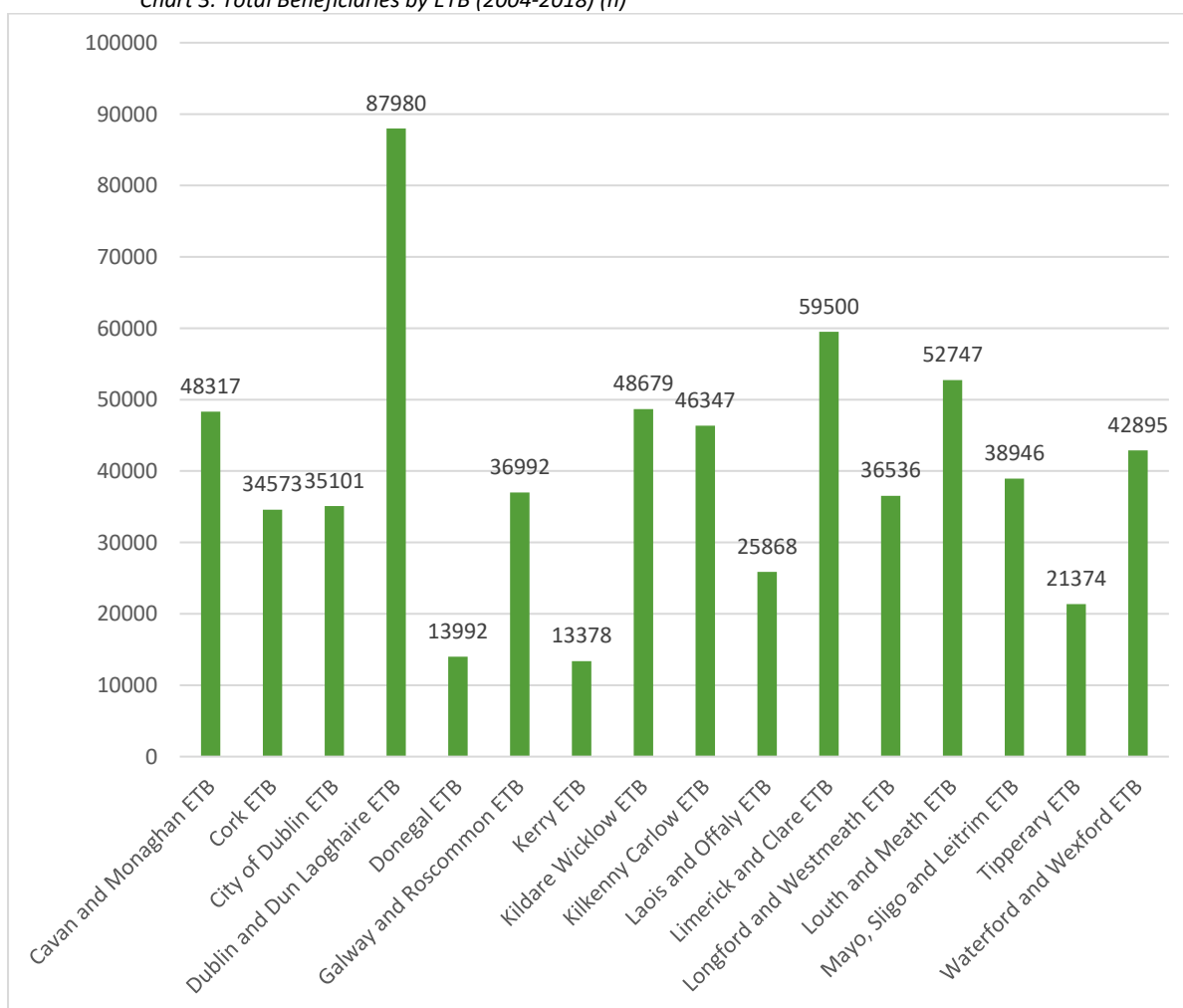


Table 1. Beneficiaries by ETB in numbers and percentage

Service	2004-2018 (n)	2004-2018 (%)
Cavan and Monaghan ETB	48317	7.5%
Cork ETB	34573	5.4%
City of Dublin ETB	35101	5.5%
Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB	87980	13.7%
Donegal ETB	13992	2.2%
Galway and Roscommon ETB	36992	5.8%
Kerry ETB	13378	2.1%
Kildare Wicklow ETB	48679	7.6%
Kilkenny Carlow ETB	46347	7.2%
Laois and Offaly ETB	25868	4.0%
Limerick and Clare ETB	59500	9.3%
Longford and Westmeath ETB	36536	5.7%
Louth and Meath ETB	52747	8.2%
Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB	38946	6.1%
Tipperary ETB	21374	3.3%
Waterford and Wexford ETB	42895	6.7%
Total	643225	100%

Staffing

The staffing levels have only been reported in the AGMS since 2011 and thus do not provide data on staffing during the period 2004-2010. However, the 2006 original staffing level agreements for the 39 services have been provided by the AGA, and the previous evaluation of the AEGI (Philips and Eustace 2010) also provide some clarity in terms of staffing levels for this period.

The agreed staffing levels for 2006 were a total of 99.5 staff across 39 services, including 39 AEG Coordinators, 21 AEGCs, and 39.5 IOs. However, in 2007, funding was made available to take on additional guidance counsellors who did not have coordination duties, in some services.

During the 2011-2018 period, Questions 1.a. in the AGMS qualitative returns requested information on the composition of the AEGS team, including the AEG Co-ordinator, adult AEGCs and IOs. See chart 4.

The variation of staffing levels between different services is not reported here as this is not evaluative or comparative research and it would run the risk of ‘pointing fingers’ at individual services. Furthermore, when discussing this issue, the overarching research advisory group emphasised that the context of each service would have to be considered as some cover vast geographical areas

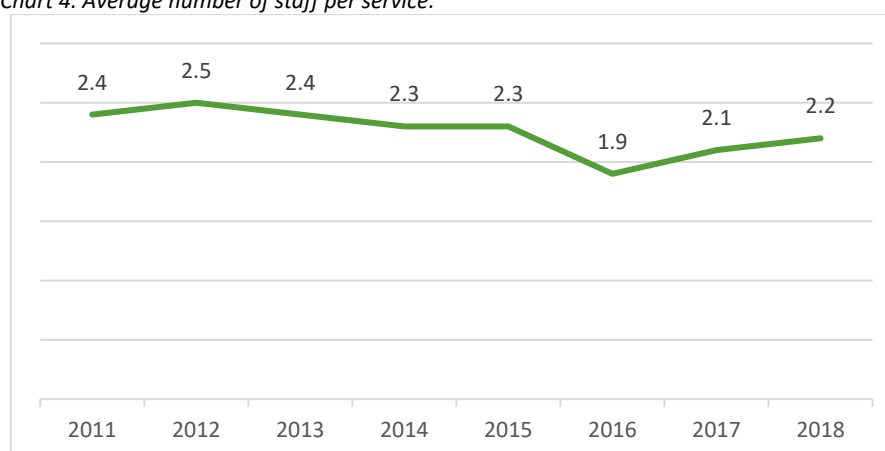
primarily through outreach provision, while some urban services work in more densely populated areas with less of their time spent on travelling.

The data available suggests that staffing levels have fallen somewhat, and rather significantly in context of a significant increase in beneficiaries of the service. See available data presented in Table 2, and Chart 4 outlines the average staff number per service between 2011 and 2018 including AEG Coordinators, AEGCs and IOs.

Table 2. Reporting of Staffing Levels (n)

	2006 ¹	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016 ²	2017	2018
Total number of full-time staff reported	99.5	94.5	96.2	82.9	91.6	80.7	75	46.25	47.15
No. of services reporting staff numbers	39	39	39	35	39	35	39	22	21
No. of services for which there is missing data	0	0	0	4	0	4	0	17	18
Average number of full-time staff per service³	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.3	1.9	2.1	2.2

Chart 4. Average number of staff per service:



There were significant gaps in the submission of qualitative data by services for the years 2016, 2017 and 2018. The research advisory group suggested that the poor level of reporting was a consequence of staffing shortages as well as ongoing and rapid staffing changes. This may be a particular issue in the services where there was no Adult Educational Guidance Co-ordinator, as that is the person with reporting responsibilities as per Department Circular 70/04. This was also recognised in the 2018

¹ Original staffing agreement, as per communication from AGA.

² AGMS data complemented by data from AGA

³ This is based on a pairwise deletion method, i.e. the average is calculated using the number of services for which there is data.

AGMS annual report where a “clarification as to the roles and responsibilities regarding completion of AGMS reports” was recommended (NCGE 2019).

The Adult Guidance Association (AGA) complemented the AGMS data for 2016 and the total number staff in the 39 services that year was n75, i.e. 24.5 full-time staff fewer compared to 2006. As staffing data for all services are available for 2006 and 2016, they are particularly useful for comparing staffing levels.

In the evaluative report of the AEGI by Philips and Eustace (2010), staffing levels were considered ‘adequate’, with only a couple of exceptions. That conclusion was reached by comparing the staff-to-student ratios with career services staffing levels in the higher education sector. However, there may be limited usefulness in contrasting staffing levels in Higher Education and FET given the different student populations in the two sectors, particularly given the target groups of the AEGI (DES 2000; 2012). Careers offices of Higher Education Institutions provides services to the higher education student cohort only and also have other designated services which many FET providers lack, such as Disability Support Services and student counselling services.

Given the nature of the AEGI target groups, the FET landscape and the pre-entry availability of the AEGI, there is no exact figure to which one can review the staffing levels. Subsequently, arriving at a number of potential AEGI clients is complex and cannot be stated with any certainty. Nonetheless, in an attempt to measure such ratio, Philips and Eustace (2010) reported an average of n972 VTOS, BTEI and literacy learners per AEGI Guidance Counsellor/Coordinator in 2007. In contrast, by 2018, the equivalent figure appears to be n1,750 learners which equates to 80% increase from 2007 (SOLAS 2019). Whilst it is not possible to determine this with absolute certainty, the 80% increase has a close correlation with the AGMS recorded increase in AEGS client per guidance counsellor from 2006 to 2016 (81%).

As Chart 5 below illustrates, the increase in one-to-one and group guidance clients is 66% when we compare 2006 and 2016. However, as the staffing levels had decreased in the same time period (-7.5%), the increase in one-to-one and group guidance per guidance counsellor/coordinator is 81%.

Chart 5. Clients per guidance counsellor/coordinator

	2006	2016	Change
One-to-one & Group guidance clients	26,252	43,962	+17,710 (n) +67.5%
Total no. Guidance counsellors / Coordinators	60	55.5	-4.5 (n) -7.5%
Average no. of clients per Guidance counsellor / Coordinator, per year	437.5	792.1	+354.6 (n) +81%

Another trend identified in the staffing arrangements is that there is an increase in service without an Adult Guidance Information Officer or with a part-time Information Officer. In 2011, n34 (87.2%) services had a full-time IO, while n1 (2.6%) AEGS had part-time IO and n4 (10.3%) services had no IO. However, in 2016, only n20 (51.3%) services had a full-time IO, while n5 (12.8%) services had part-time IO and n14 (35.9%) services had no IO.

An important contextual factor to consider in relation to staffing is that in 2009, the Government put in place a moratorium on replacement of public service staff as per Circular 23/2009. This moratorium applied to the AEGS within the VECs at that time and in services where staff left, were absent on maternity leave or retired, they were not replaced. In February 2014, the NCGE made a submission to the Department of Education and Skills, proposing that AEGS staff would be designated as 'frontline' and that the moratorium thereby should not apply to them. While the DES agreed to review the proposal, the government moratorium was later partially lifted in 2015

One may expect to see an increase in staffing levels after the moratorium on replacement of public service staff was partially lifted in 2015. However, 2016 saw the lowest number of staff and some AEGS reported a lack of clarity in terms of how the lifted moratorium should affect their service provision.

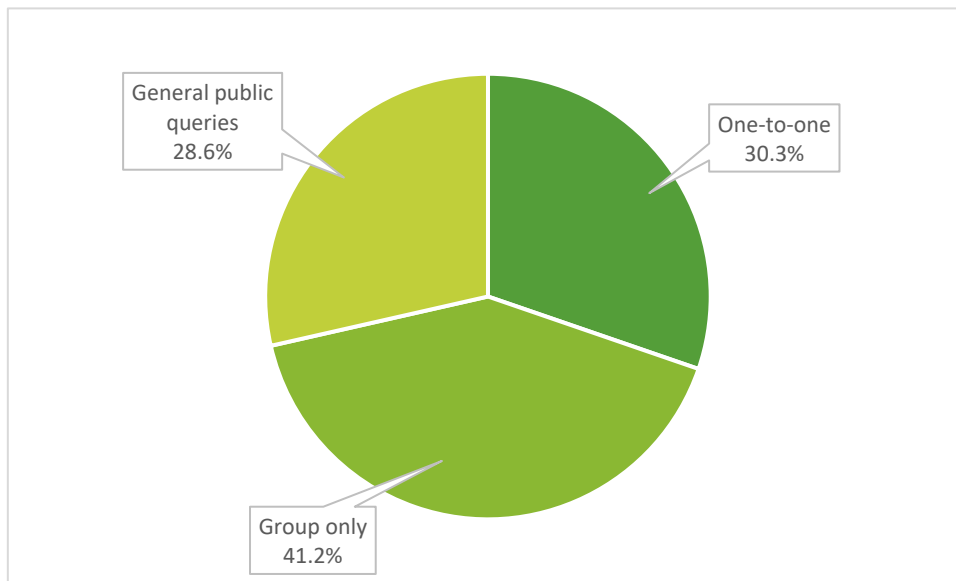
There are a number of other comments within the qualitative reports during the 2016-2018 reported time period in the AGMS relating to staffing. For example, some of the AEGS staff have been listed as 'guidance resource workers' or 'project workers' in qualitative reports submitted by services. Some also state that although a guidance counsellor has taken on coordinator duties and responsibilities, they are not paid the co-ordinating allowance (as per Department Circular 70/04). Other comments include staff being redeployed from other FET services, or contracted and paid for by external budgets, such as BTEI or a Traveller Training Centre. In the context of the 2014-2019 FET strategy, the DES issued *Guidelines for the Integration of Contracted Guidance Staff within the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative* (DES 2014). Nonetheless, there appears to be a level of uncertainty regarding both the appointment of AEGS staff and the reporting duties, as per the DES Circulars 70/04 and 0015/2007 and Guidelines 2014, which were active during the relevant period for this report (2004-2018).

Guidance Delivery

Guidance delivery is categorised in the AGMS as either one-to-one guidance, group guidance or general public queries. Typically, the AEG Co-ordinators and AEGCs deliver one-to-one and group guidance whilst the IOs respond to general public queries and provide information via group seminars and information materials and resources.

Group guidance accounts for the largest proportion of all clients in the 2004-2018 time period, namely 41.2%, compared to 30.3% one-to-one and 28.6% general public queries.

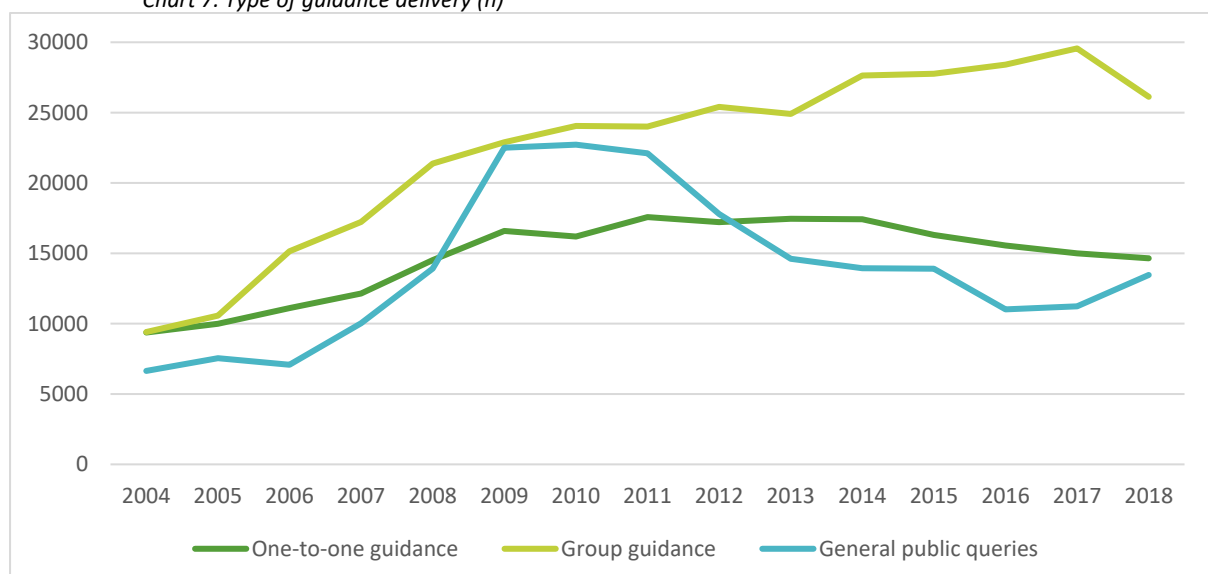
Chart 6. Proportion by type of guidance delivery, 2004-2018 (%)



However, the number of clients by type of guidance delivery has changed over time and not entirely in line with the overall number of beneficiaries (see chart 7 below). Although the total number of clients between 2004-2009 saw a 150% increase, the number of general public queries increased disproportionately during that time at 239%, from n6,642 in 2004 to n22,502 in 2009. It then decreased on a yearly basis between the years 2011 and 2017, with a small increase in 2018.

Group guidance has accounted for the highest number of individual beneficiaries every year and the number increased consistently, with the exception of a small decrease in 2013 and also in 2018. Meanwhile, the number of one-to-one guidance recipients has fluctuated to a lesser degree, but has gradually increased from 2004 to 2014, and decreased somewhat thereafter.

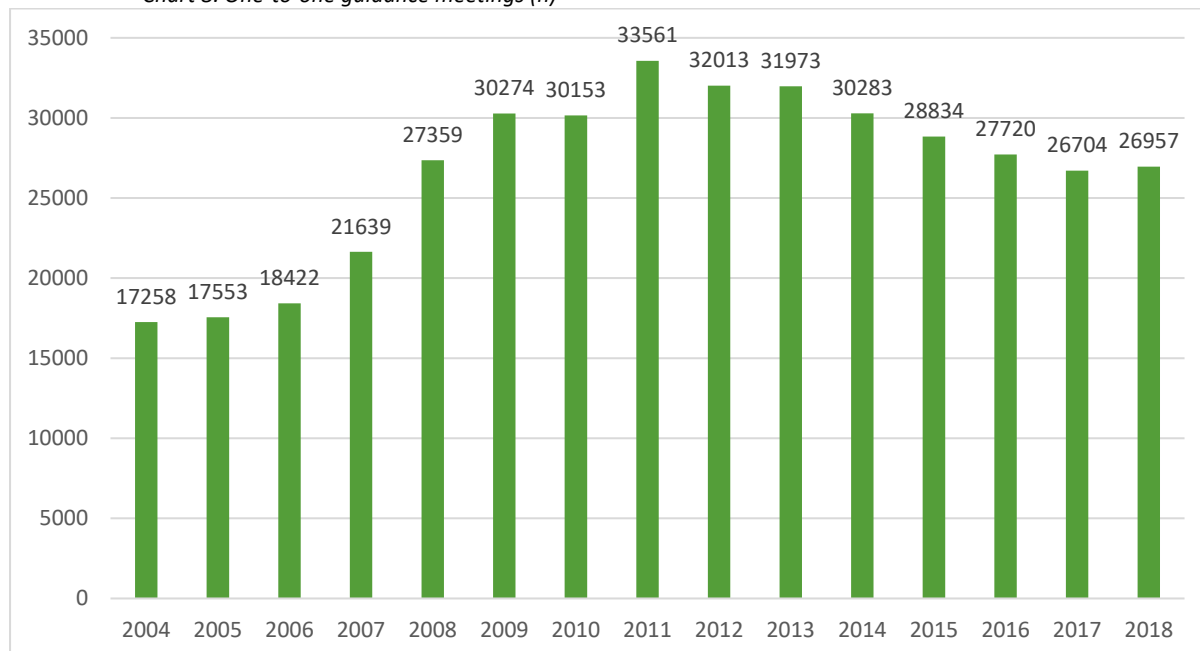
Chart 7. Type of guidance delivery (n)



One-to-one guidance meetings

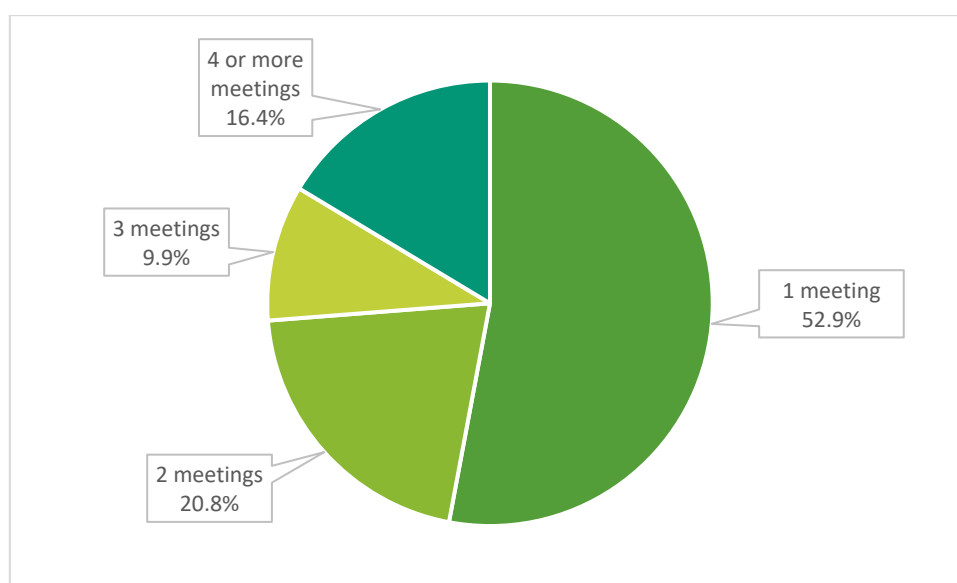
The total number of client meetings recorded in the AGMS for the years 2004-2018 is n400,663 and the number of meetings per year are presented in chart 8 below.

Chart 8. One-to-one guidance meetings (n)



Just over half (52.9%) of all clients had only one meeting in the AEGS, whilst 20.8% had two meetings, 9.9% had three meetings, and 16.4% had four meetings or more. This suggests that the guidance counselling and information needs are highly individual. Whilst some clients only require once-off support, others need considerably more time to reflect and address various issues in order to make and act on decisions (Savickas *et al.* 2009).

Chart 9. Number of meetings per client, 2004-2018



When an AEGS practitioner is recording their client meetings in the AGMS, they have the option to identify the main purpose of the client meeting from a drop-down menu. The four categories available are:

- Careers/vocational guidance
- Educational guidance
- Information/advice
- Personal counselling

These categories are derived from the integrated model of guidance counselling, which includes career, educational and personal guidance, as well as information (National Guidance Forum 2007; DES 2012). However, the research advisory group highlighted that in practice, when working with adults it is not always possible to distinguish between these types of guidance counselling as they overlap and interlink. Although the purpose of a client meeting may be educational guidance, personal and/or career guidance topics may also be discussed.

Overall, the purpose for the majority of client meetings are categorised as ‘educational guidance’ and there has been an increase over the years (see *Chart 10* for contrasting data for 2004 and 2018, and *Chart 11* for a year by year presentation of the data). For example, educational guidance was the purpose of 43.1% client meetings in 2004 and 62.0% in 2018. In the same time period, careers/vocational guidance has increased from 12.5% to 18.5%, and information/advice has decreased from 42.7% to 18.7%. Meanwhile, personal guidance counselling has remained the least common, and it decreased from 1.7% to 0.8%.

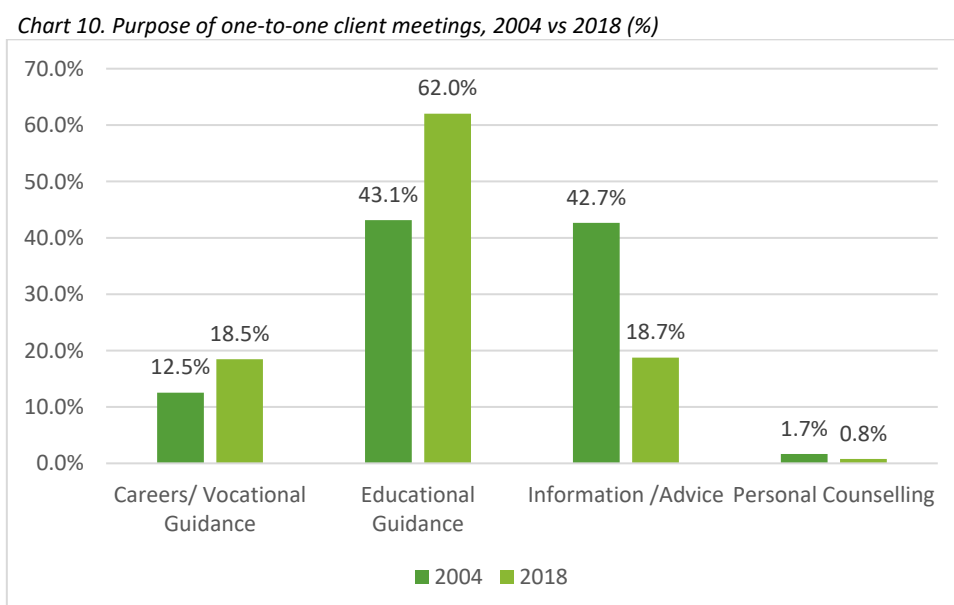
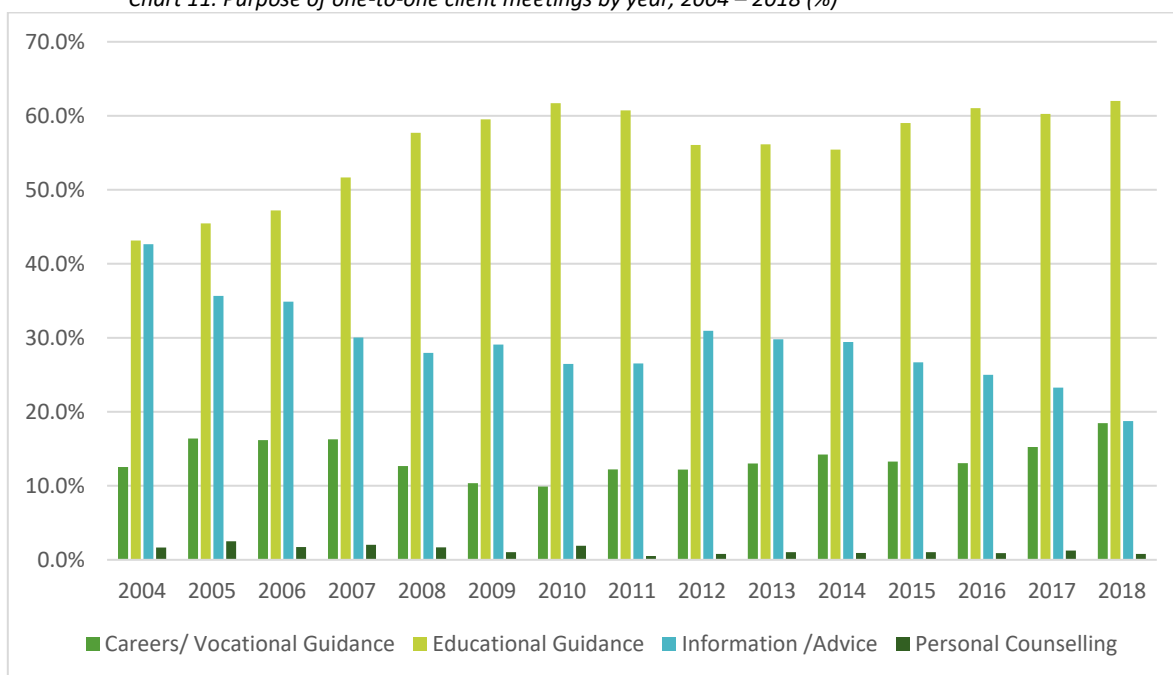


Chart 11. Purpose of one-to-one client meetings by year, 2004 – 2018 (%)

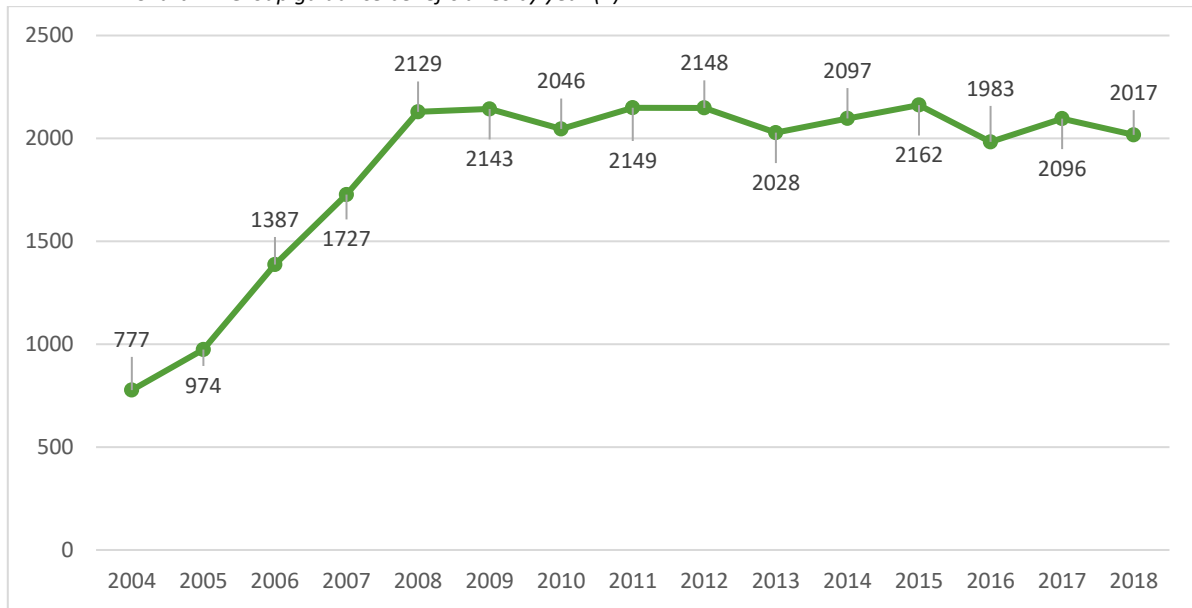


Group guidance

Group guidance is delivered in a number of formats and with different objectives. Some of the qualitative data in the AGMS provide contextualised insights into the group guidance delivery. For example, in situations where a group of employees have been made redundant, AEGS have organised and delivered workshops on CV preparation, LinkedIn, mock interviews, networking and proactive job-search skills. Other examples of workshops topics covered in group guidance sessions include study skills, CAO and FET applications, and personal development related competences in confidence building, motivation, and career decision making. In other words, topics which focus on equipping clients with study and career management skills so they can deal and cope with a precarious and fast changing labour market.

Chart 12 below plots the number of groups accessing the AEGS each year, where the lowest number of groups were seen in 2004 (n777) and the highest number of groups were seen in 2015 (n2,162).

Chart 12. Group guidance beneficiaries by year (n)



The number of groups (see table 3 below) has remained close to, or above two thousand per year since 2008. However, the average size of the groups has increased in those years, leading to a higher number of group guidance beneficiaries. As per both table 3 and chart 13, the average group size has ranged from n10 clients (2007 and 2008) to n14.3 clients (2016).

Table 3. Group guidance (n)

Year	No of groups	Clients receiving group guidance	Average group size	Clients receiving both group & one-to-one guidance
2004	777	9406	12.1	1071
2005	974	10572	10.9	947
2006	1387	15145	10.9	1416
2007	1727	17225	10	1505
2008	2129	21379	10	1740
2009	2143	22895	10.7	2197
2010	2046	24049	11.8	2190
2011	2149	24003	11.7	2746
2012	2148	25412	11.8	3142
2013	2028	24908	12.3	4161
2014	2097	27639	13.2	3393
2015	2162	27763	12.8	3024
2016	1983	28405	14.3	2377
2017	2096	29563	14.1	2027
2018	2017	26125	13	2198

Chart 13. Average number of clients in each group guidance session (n)

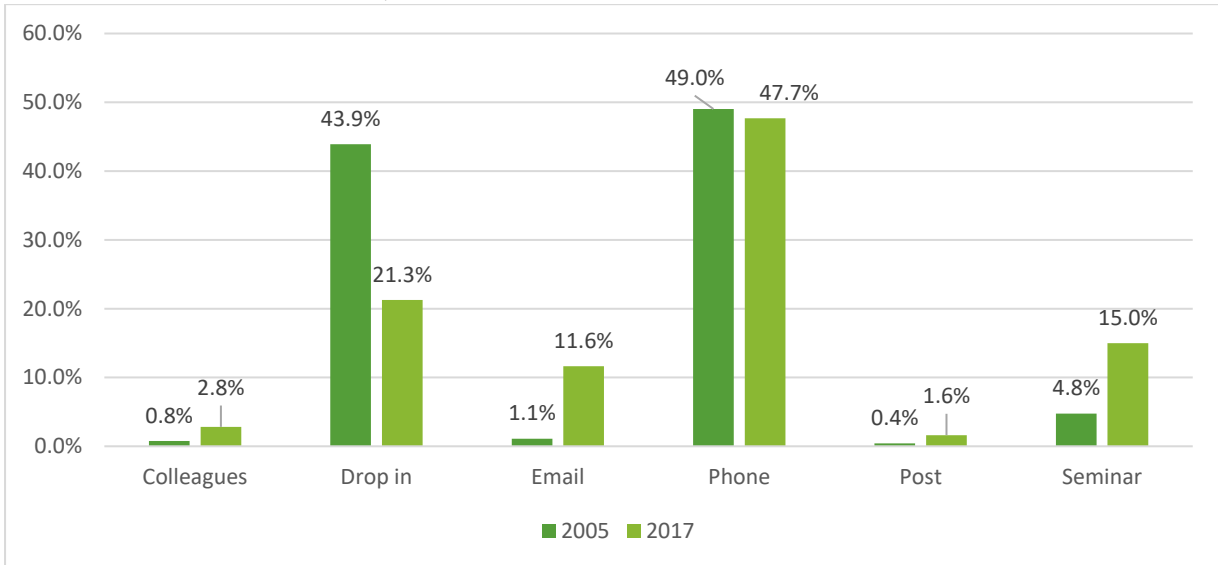


General Public Queries

General Public Queries (GPQ) refer to those engaging with the AEGS information services, as opposed to attending group or one-to-one guidance sessions. This is an important part of the AEGS role in providing ‘pre-entry’ guidance and information. As the charts under *Guidance Delivery* illustrate, GPQs make up 28.6% of all AEGS beneficiaries and the number of GPQs increased significantly from 2004 to 2010, then decreased year by year until 2016 and increased somewhat in 2017 and again in 2018. The research advisory group also emphasised that the decrease in GPQs reported was a consequence of the rising shortage of Information Officers in several AEGS for a number of years (e.g. see 87.2% services had a full-time IO in 2011, compared to only 51.3% in 2016).

The public can avail of the AEGS information services through different means. While telephone-based queries represent nearly half of all GPQs (e.g. 49% in 2005 and 47.7% in 2017), some other types of GPQs have varied more through the years (see chart 14). The most significant decrease was seen in relation to drop in’s, which accounted for 43.9% in 2005, and only 21.3% in 2017. Meanwhile, only 1.1% of GPQs were e-mail queries in 2005, but 11.6% in 2017; and GPQs through seminars were 4.8% in 2005 and 15% in 2017. GPQs through colleagues (0.8%-2.8%) and postal queries (0.4%-1.6%) have remained small in proportion to other forms of GPQs.

Chart 14 General Public Queries

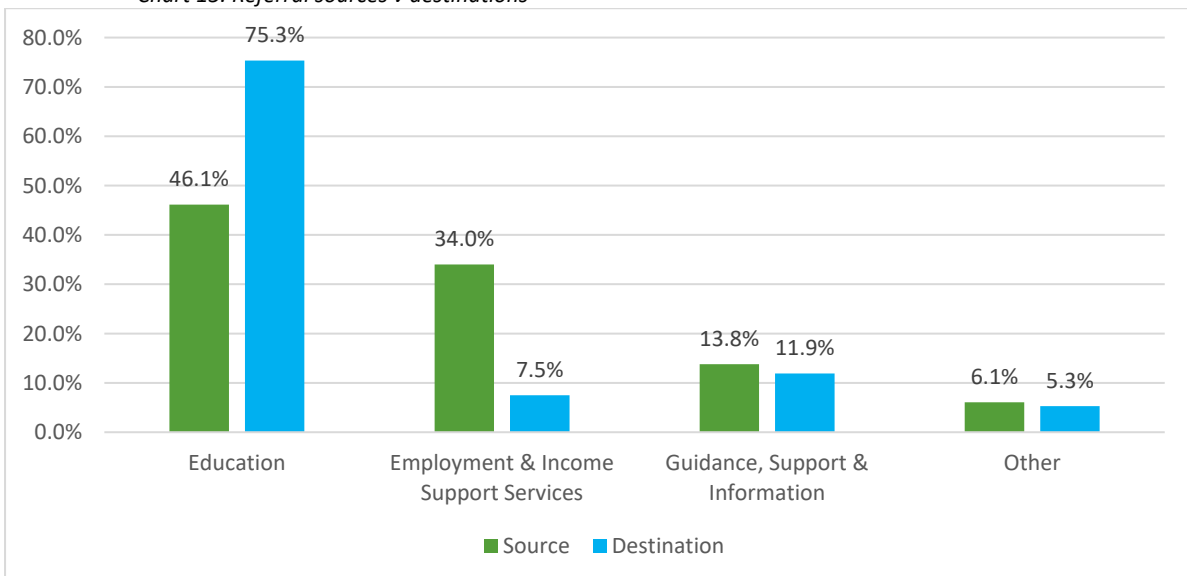


Referrals

AEGS both receive and make referrals to other services and professionals. Referrals are identified in the AGMS on a local basis and are not categorised across all services. Reporting on the referral sources and destinations are thereby somewhat complex and required content analysis. The analysis of all inwards and outward referral data resulted in four key categories emerging, namely: (1) Education; (2) Employment & Income Support Services; (3) Other Guidance, Support & Information; and (4) Other.

Chart 15 contrasts inward referrals (sources) with outward referrals (destinations) and it clearly illustrates the role the AEGS has in facilitating adults to engage in education. A further breakdown of the four categories are outlined subsequently for both inward and outward referrals.

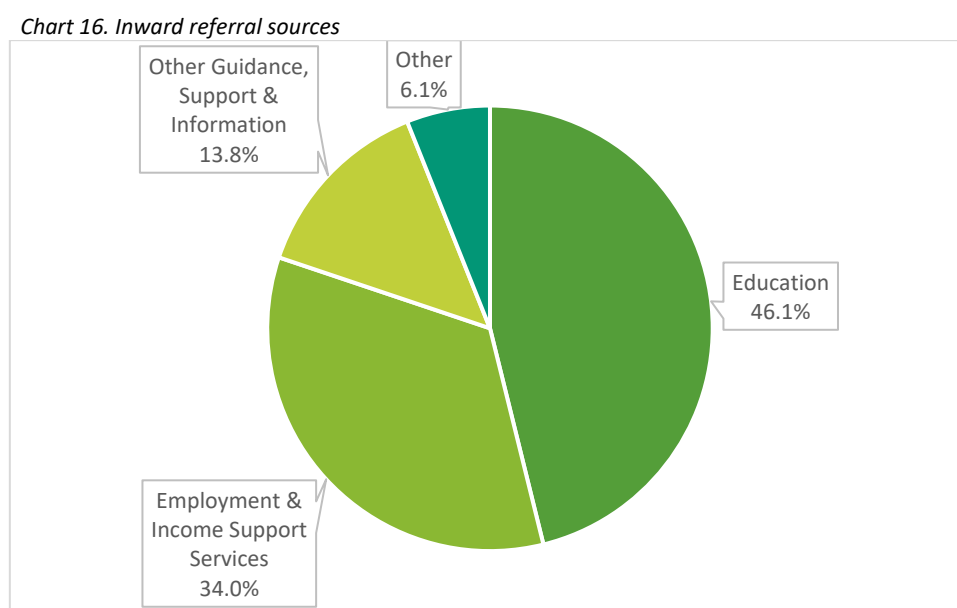
Chart 15. Referral sources v destinations



Inward referrals

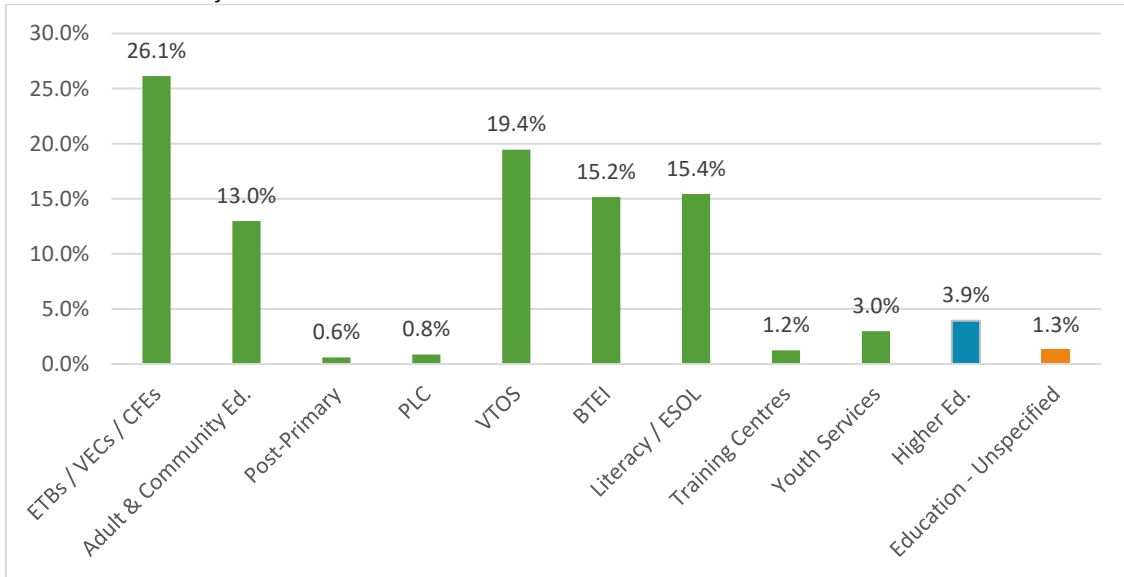
The proportion of clients with a referral source recorded in the AGMS between the years 2004 and 2018 was 71.5%. However, an interrogation of the data revealed that a significant number of those were either 'self-referrals'/drop-ins (33%) or the result of promotional activities and material (e.g. events, outreach, brochures, local advertising or websites) (9.2%).

When clients who have accessed the AEGS through self-referrals and promotions are excluded, it transpires that 43.9% of AEGS clients have been referred from another service or professionals. Of those, the largest cohort has been referred by education providers (46.1%), while 34% have been referred by employment & income support services, 13.8% by Other guidance, support & information service, and 6.1% by 'others' (see Chart 16).



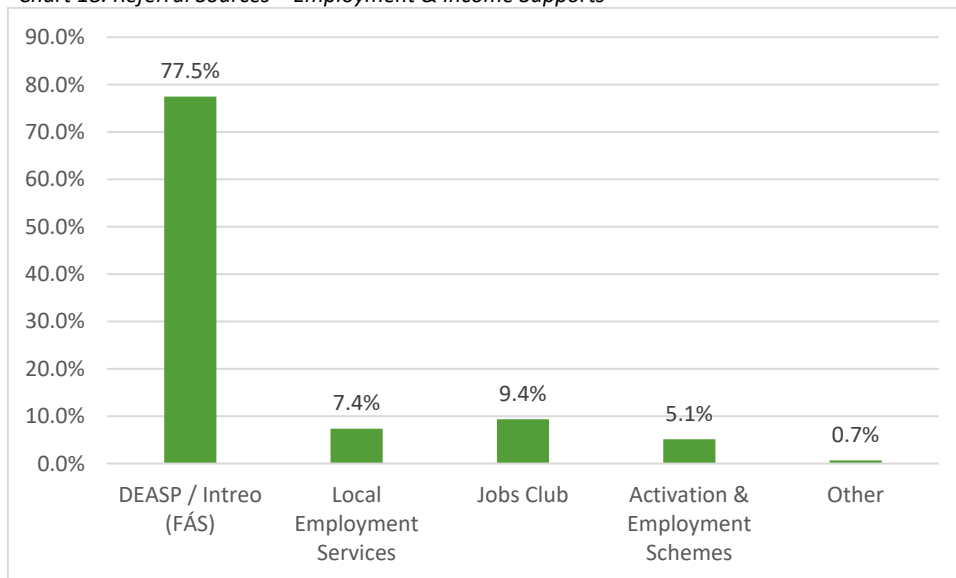
All sub-categories in the FET sector (green bars in Chart 17) combined accounted for 94.8 % of all referrals within the Education category. Meanwhile, Higher Education (blue bars) only made up 3.9%, and education providers which have not been specified in terms of NFQ level or sector (labelled as 'other' in Chart 17) 1.3% (red bar). The most common sub-category was ETB's / VEC's / Colleges of Further Education (CFE's) (26.1%), followed by VTOS (19.4%) and Literacy/ESOL (15.4%).

Chart 17. Referral sources - Education



Just over a third (34%) of all referral sources come from within the category Employment & Income Supports, and within this, DEASP/Intreo (and including the now disbanded FÁS) was by far the most common one (77.5%), followed by Jobs Clubs (9.4%) and Local Employment Services (7.4%) (see Chart 18).

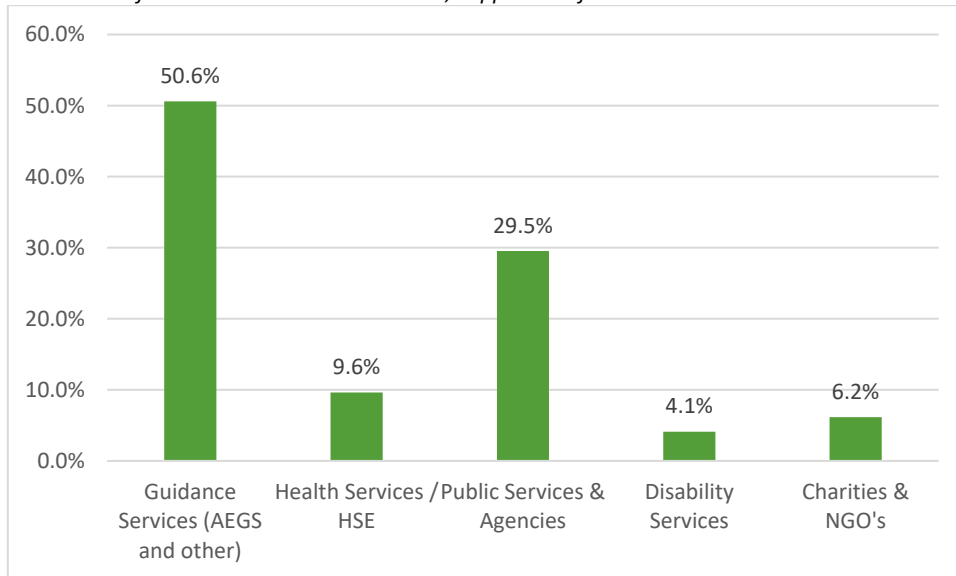
Chart 18. Referral Sources – Employment & Income Supports



Other Guidance, support & information services accounted for 13.8% of all referral and just over half of them (50.6%) came from guidance services, including AEGS information officers. This may include referrals to the guidance counsellor from an IO in the same AEGS, or from a different AEGS (this distinction was not made in the AGMS data). The second most common referral source was Public

services & Agencies (29.5%) (e.g. Citizens Information Services and Local Area Partnerships), followed by Health Services / HSE (9.6%), including psychological counselling services (see chart 19).

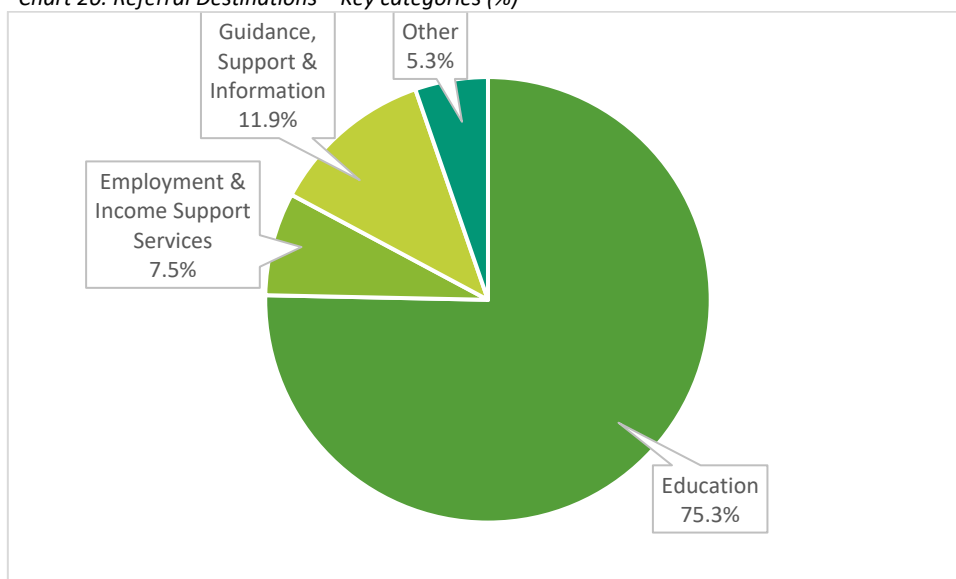
Chart 19. Referral Sources – Other Guidance, Support & Information



Outward Referrals

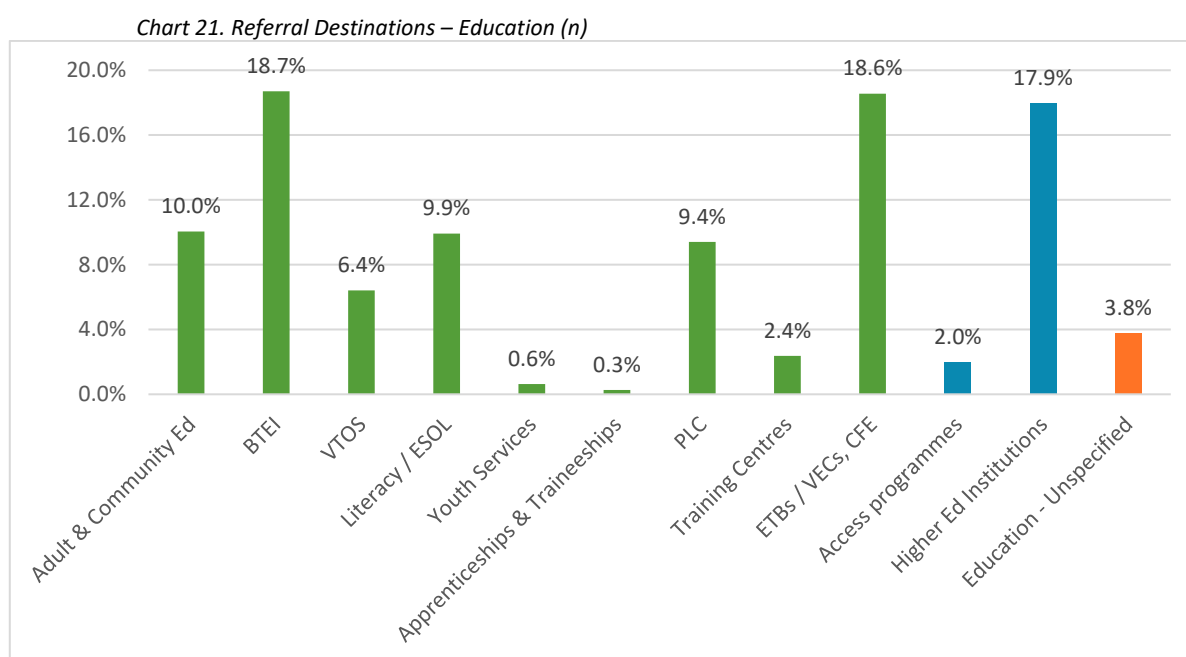
The AGMS data suggest that just under half (46.5%) of AEGS clients were referred outwards to another service or education provider. Some clients had more than one referral destination recorded, the following charts refer to the proportion of all referral destinations in the AGMS (see Chart 20).

Chart 20. Referral Destinations – Key categories (%)



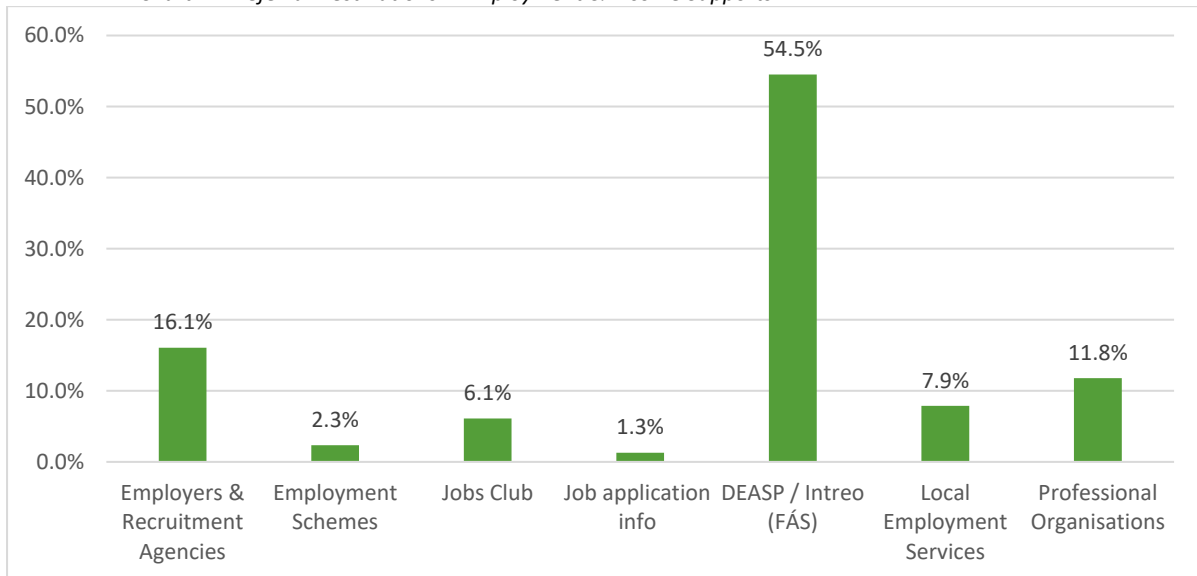
Each key category, with the exception of the ‘other’ category, also has a number of sub-categories which are presented in Charts 21-23. Education accounted for 75.3% of all referral destinations and Chart 21 explores this category in more detail, where the bars in green are FET providers, blue are Higher Education, and red ‘other’.

All sub-categories in the FET sector (green bars) combined accounted for 76.3% of all referrals destinations within the Education category, Higher Education (blue bars) made up 19.9% and education providers which have not been specified in terms of NFQ level or sector (labelled as ‘other’ in Chart 21) 3.8% (red bar). The two most frequent education referral destinations were BTEI (18.7%) and ETB/VEC/CFE (18.6%), followed by Higher Education Institutions (17.9%).



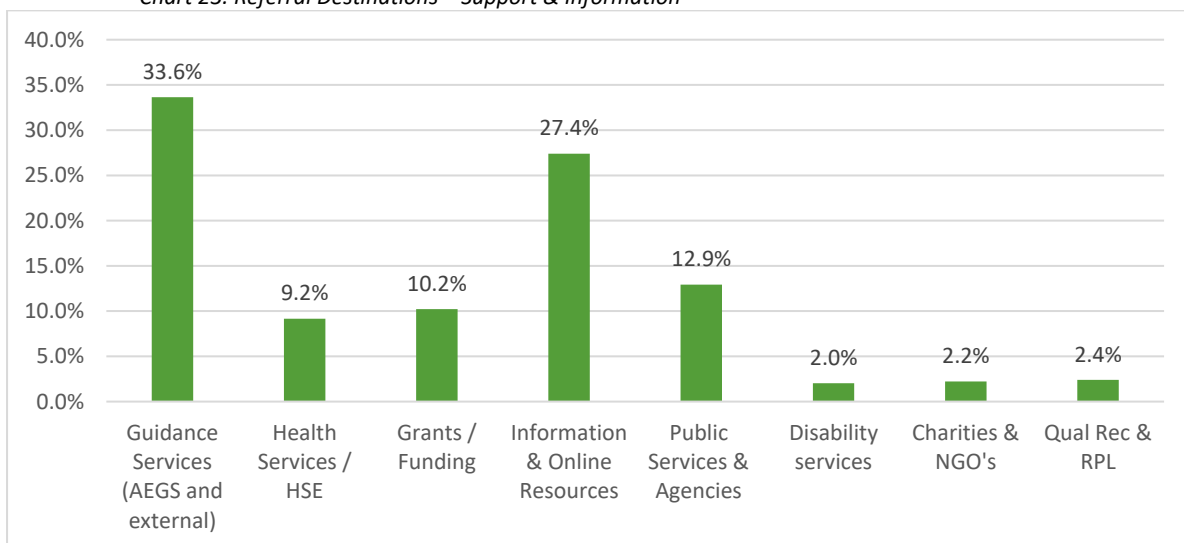
Employment services and income support services (see chart 22) accounted for 7.5% of all referral destinations, and within this category, referrals to the DEASP / Intreo (and including the now disbanded FÁS) was the most frequent (54.5%), followed by Employers and recruitment agencies (16.1%) and Professional Organisations (11.8%).

Chart 22. Referral Destinations – Employment & Income Supports



Other Guidance, support and information services was the second largest category as 11.9% of all referral destinations fit into this category. Chart 23 illustrates how approximately one third (33.6%) of all these referrals were to a guidance service, either another AEGS or external guidance, such as a third level career service or a private practitioner. Information material and online resources was the second most prevalent (27.4%), which included websites of a colleges and online careers databases for example. The third most common sub-category was Public Services & Agencies (12.9%), such as Citizens Information Services, MABS, Enterprise Boards, Local Area Partnerships and Development Companies.

Chart 23. Referral Destinations – Support & Information



The high proportion of clients who accessed the AEGS through referrals and who are referred by guidance counsellors to education providers, services and agencies, suggest that AEGS practitioners have strong connections with other local services and network extensively.

Due to the local nature of the recording of referrals in the AGMS, it is not feasible to cross-correlate the referral data with different client target groups for example, which would yield even greater insights into the nature of referrals. It may be useful to consider the manner in which referrals are recorded in the future development.

Client Demographics

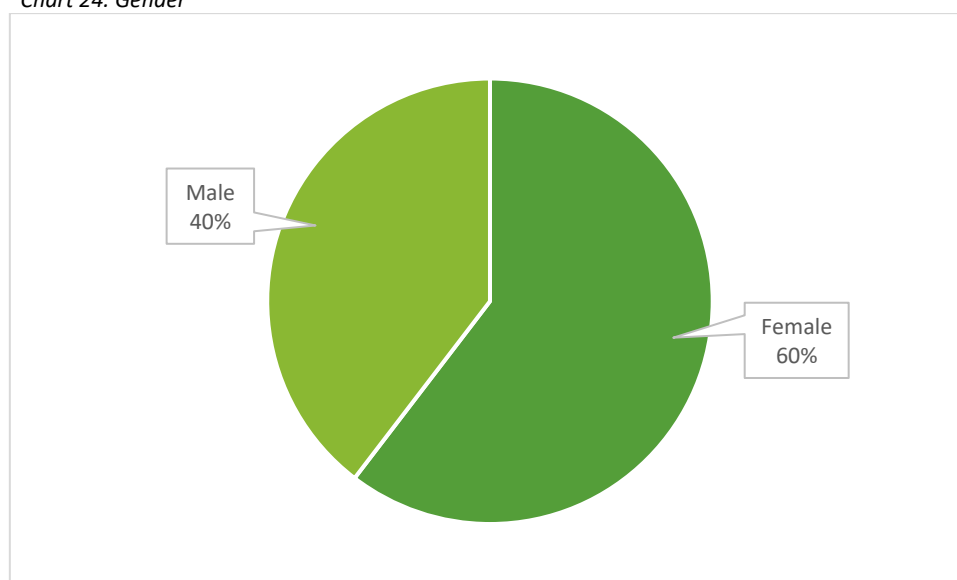
When a new client engages with the guidance services, certain demographic data is collected and reported in the AGMS. However, client data is typically not gathered for those who only access group guidance sessions or for general public queries, which means that most figures in this section refer to one-to-one guidance beneficiaries.

The main data entries relating to the demographic details of clients are reported here, including gender, age, nationality, target group categories, learning context and NFQ level. However, as AEGS also had the facility to gather locally relevant data, there are several more data entries in the AGMS which are utilised by a smaller number of AEGS and can therefore not be reported on here as part of national reports.

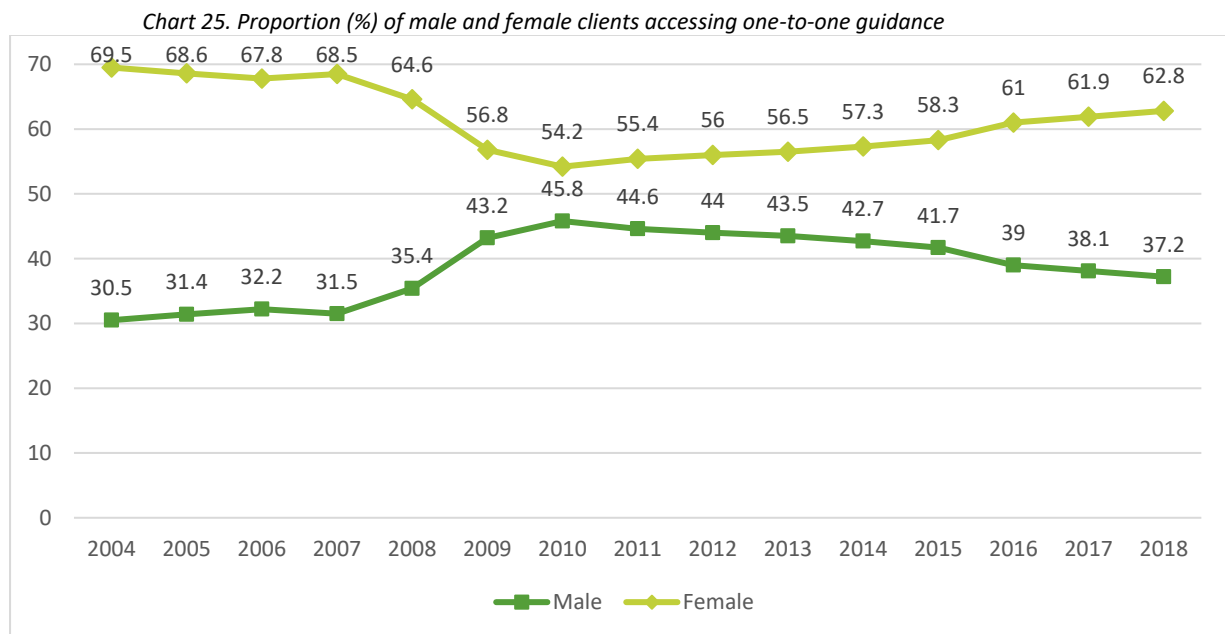
Gender

The overall gender distribution of the clients accessing one-to-one guidance for the years included in this research (i.e. 2004-2018) is 40.0% (n66,046) male and 60.0% (n99,161) female (see chart 24). Whilst this appears to suggest that male clients are underrepresented in the AEGS, the gender distribution of clients should be considered in the context of the gender distribution in FET enrolments overall. In 2018, 60.2% of FET learners were female, compared to 62.8% of AEGS one-to-one clients. Meanwhile, 39.8% of FET learners were male, compared to 37.2% of AEGS one-to-one clients. This would suggest that female learners registered in FET programmes only marginally access one-to-one guidance more than their male counterparts.

Chart 24. Gender



However, there are some interesting changes to note in terms of gender distribution (see chart 25). In 2008, there was an increase in the proportion of male clients, and the years 2009-2015 are the only years where over 40% of one-to-one clients were male. This appears to be linked to the financial recession as the years correlate and the unemployment levels amongst men was particularly high during this time period. This suggests that AEGS are responding to social and economic change and challenges.



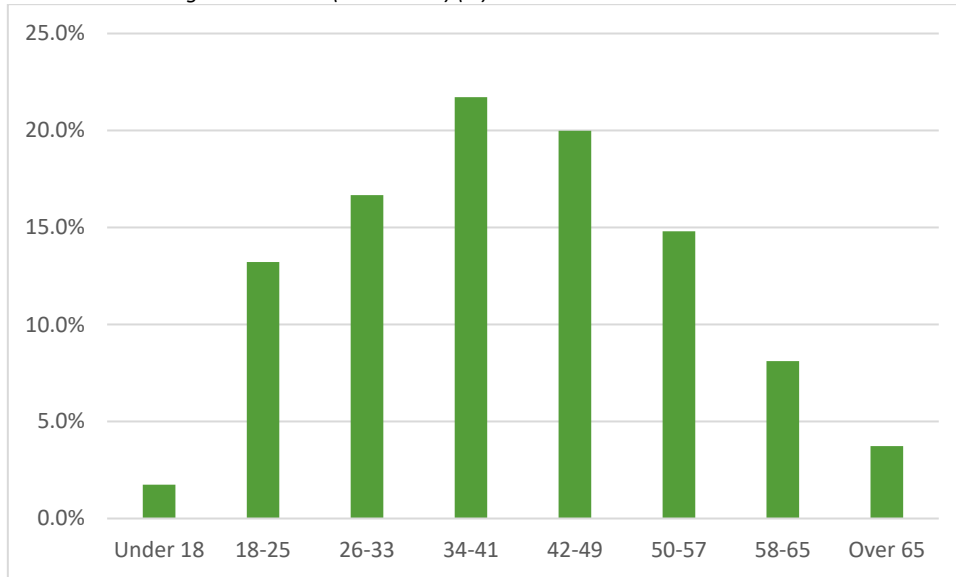
A total n13 clients (0.006% of the total number of clients) in the 2004-2018 time period were *not* classified as either male or female in the AGMS. One can only speculate that some of these clients may not wish to identify as either male or female or that the practitioner was unable to identify the gender of the client. However, statistics on the prevalence of persons identifying as non-binary and transgender in the general population (estimated to be approx. 0.4% in some studies⁴) would suggest that such options are needed in a client management system in order to be more inclusive of all clients.

Age

The age of a client is recorded in bands as opposed to the actual age. It is evident from the data that the AEGS engage with clients across the lifespan, from the youngest at the age of 16 to the over 65s. See chart 26 for the overall age distribution, inclusive of all clients in the 2004-2018 period.

⁴ Titman, N. (2014). Available: www.practicalandrogyny.com
 OVERARCHING RESEARCH ON DATA GATHERED IN DES/SOLAS/NCGE ADULT GUIDANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF THE
 ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE INITIATIVE 2004-2018, Published December 2020

Chart 26. Client age distribution (2004-2018) (%)



However, the age profile of one-to-one guidance clients has shifted over time towards a younger age profile. Nonetheless, the AEGS has remained open to clients of all ages as even after years of continuous emphasis on the younger population in labour market activation policies, 17.1% of all clients in 2018 were over the age of 50. Chart 27 illustrate the significant change which has taken place, as it contrasts client age profiles in 2004 with 2018.

Chart 27. Age distribution, 2004 vs 2018

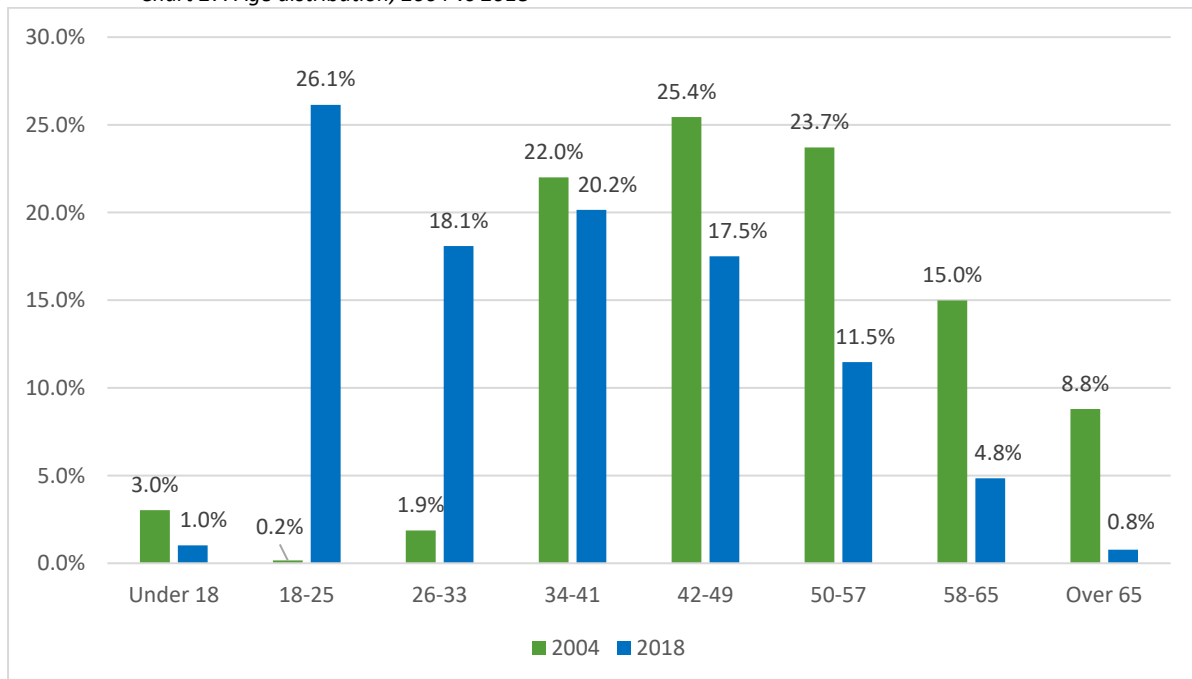
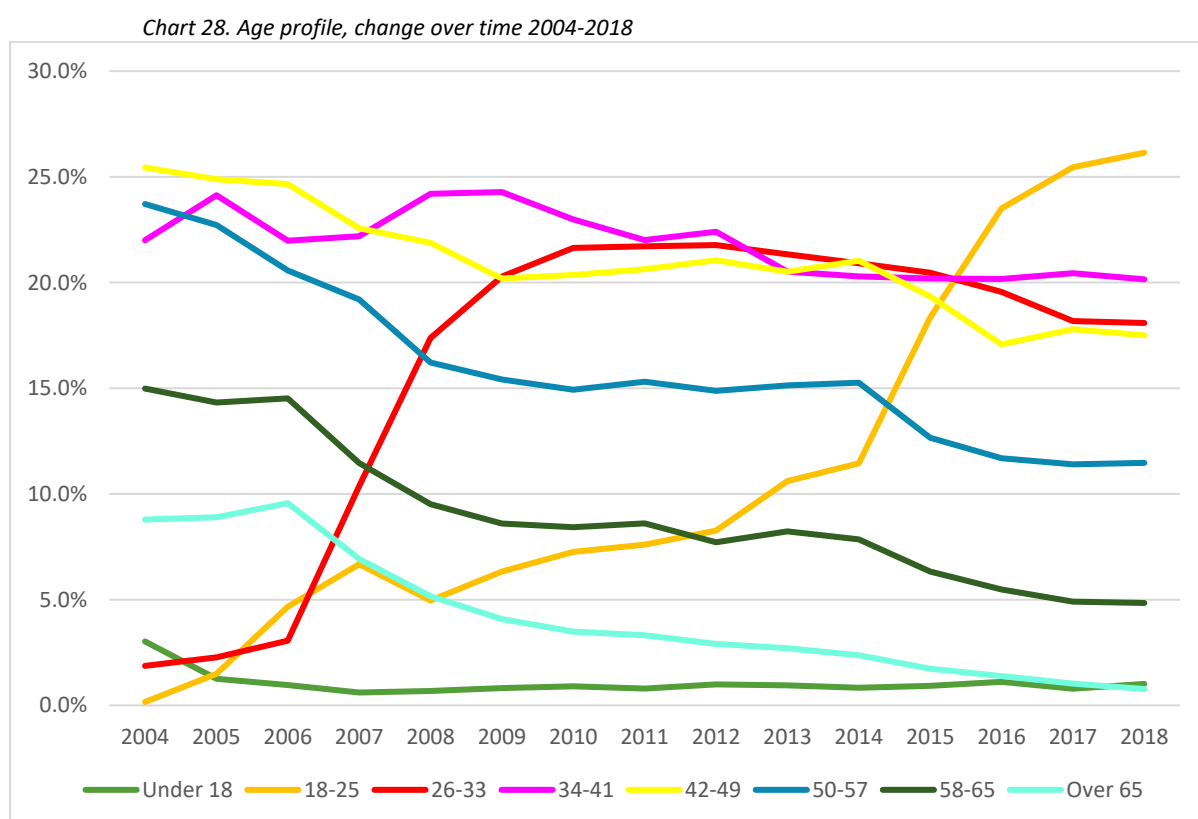


Chart 28 also clearly illustrates how the age profile of the AEGS clients has shifted from older to younger. Most notable is the 18-25 age band which was the smallest cohort in 2004 and the largest in 2018.

The 26-33 age band has also seen a significant increase, as it started at 1.9% in 2004 and has been near the 20% mark during the latter 10 years, 2008-2018.

The 34-41 and the 42-49 age bands have both remained relatively stable throughout this time period when compared to the other bands. The 34-41 age band has ranged from 20.2% to 24.3% with some variations, while the 42-49 age band has declined from 25.4% to 17.5%.

The age bands which have declined the most are the three highest age bands, namely age 50-57, 58-65 and over 65: as well as the youngest cohort, Under 18.



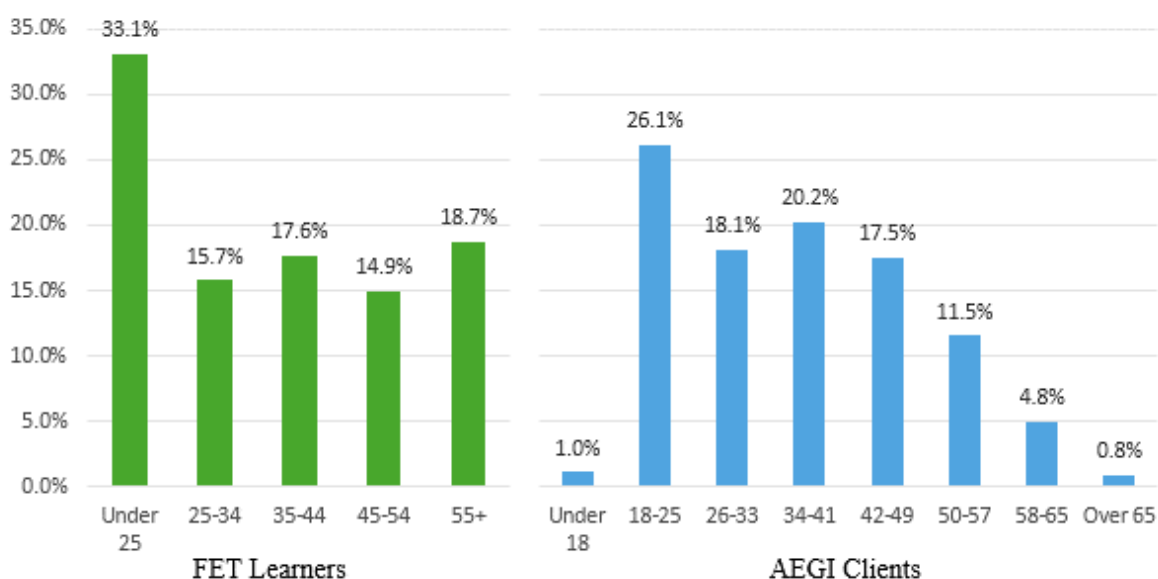
Unfortunately, the age bands used in the AGMS do not correspond with SOLAS’s learner data (2019) which means that it is not possible to accurately and precisely compare the age profile with the total FET learner population. However, the two charts side by side below (Chart 29) illustrate that there is some difference between the age distribution amongst FET learners as a whole, and AEGS clients. Primarily, this difference relates to a smaller proportion of clients in the older age categories accessing guidance.

With regards to the younger age categories, it is reasonable to assume that many FET learners in that age category are registered in Post Leaving Cert (PLC) / CFE provision, where programme guidance

counselling is the expectation and AEGS provision is not appropriate (ESRI 2018). However, although the vast majority (93%) of PLC providers offer guidance counselling, recent research found that it was only accessed by one third of PLC learners (ESRI 2018). ESRI speculate that this may be because students are either not availing of the guidance; that it is not accessible due to limited hours available for example, or because they may be dissatisfied with the nature of the service provided. This begs the question of where, or if, this cohort is availing of guidance counselling.

Meanwhile, older FET learners are more often involved in adult and community education and may be satisfied in their level of engagement with the AEGS. This suggests that AEGS delivery is based on client needs, as opposed to providing guidance delivery across all cohorts regardless of need. Awareness of the AEGS across the sector presents a challenge, however, there are examples of guidance practice which was integrated into literacy programmes, such as the Intensive Tuition of Adult Basic Education (ITABE), which was intended to ensure that potential clients have access to the services through their engagement with literacy and community education.

Chart 29. Age profiles of FET learners vs. AEGI Clients, 2018⁵



In addition to demographic changes in the general public, government policy has likely driven this change too, such as the activation agenda focusing on younger adults accessing education and the labour market. For example, 'Youth Guarantee' (DSFA 2014) which is a scheme supported by the European Commission which would see young people aged 18 to 24 offered a job, work experience, apprenticeship, or training within a defined period of time after leaving school or becoming unemployed. Whilst the AEGS was not formally included in this process, it is possible that referrals from other agencies may have been influenced by such policies.

⁵ Please note that the age bands do not correlate exactly, and they are therefore not entirely comparable.
 OVERARCHING RESEARCH ON DATA GATHERED IN DES/SOLAS/NCGE ADULT GUIDANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF THE
 ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE INITIATIVE 2004-2018, Published December 2020

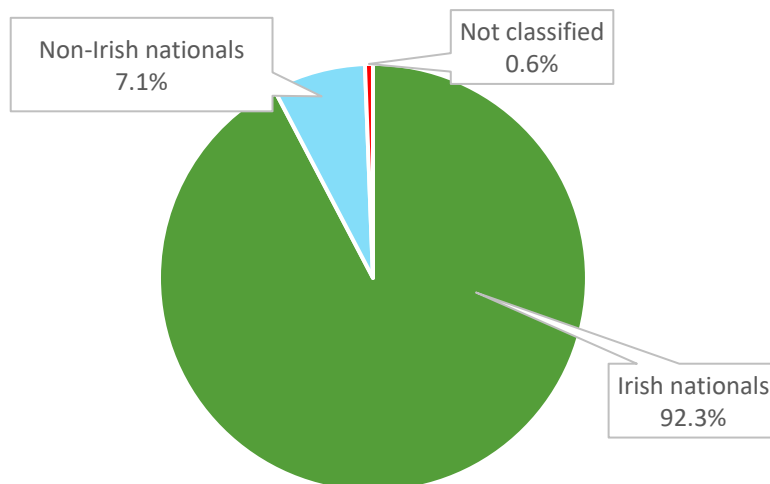
Nationality

A total of n170 different nationalities are represented in the client data between 2004 and 2018. In total, Irish nationals make up 92.3% of all one-to-one clients, and non-Irish nationals 7.1% (and 0.6% 'not classified', see chart 30).

On first glance, the data suggest that non-Irish nationals access the AEGS to a lesser extent than Irish nationals, as the CSO Census figures suggests that the proportion of the population who were non-Irish nationals in 2011 was 12.2% and 11.6% in 2016. Furthermore, SOLAS (2019) estimate that in 2018, 21.5% of all FET learners were non-Irish nationals and in the same year, 5.9% of the AEGS one-to-one guidance clients were recorded as non-Irish nationals, leaving a difference of 15.6 percentage points. Previous research has also reported that members of migrant communities is one group which face significant barriers to FET participation (e.g. Mooney & O'Rourke 2017).

However, the research advisory group has highlighted that 'Irish' is the default nationality in the AGMS so many clients with other nationalities may be recorded as Irish if the practitioner does not change the default setting. Furthermore, some practitioners may base their data entry on country of origin and others on citizenship for example. The research advisory group also emphasised that practitioners may not want to insult clients by assuming that everyone with a foreign accent, name or presentation is not Irish by nationality, and may therefore not query it or change the default setting. Additionally, there is qualitative data in the AGMS suggesting that services regularly focus on providing access to both the AEGS and to FET for adults in ESOL classes and asylum seekers. It may be useful to consider the manner in which client nationality is recorded in future development.

Chart 30. Nationality of AEGI one-to-one clients (2004-2018)

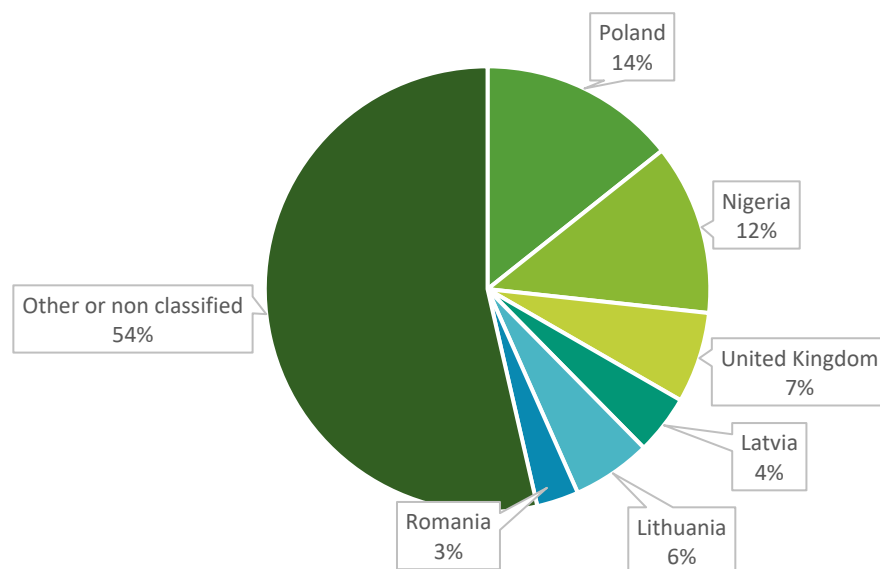


Of the non-Irish nationalities represented in the data, the countries with the highest number of clients are:

- Poland (n1,682)
- Nigeria (n1,457)
- United Kingdom (n775)
- Lithuania (n675)
- Latvia (n506)
- Romania (n358)

Chart 31 outlines the percentage of countries represented amongst the non-Irish clients. In other words, Polish clients made up 14% of the 7.2% of clients which are not Irish nationals, but Polish clients only represent 1% of the total number of one-to-one guidance clients.

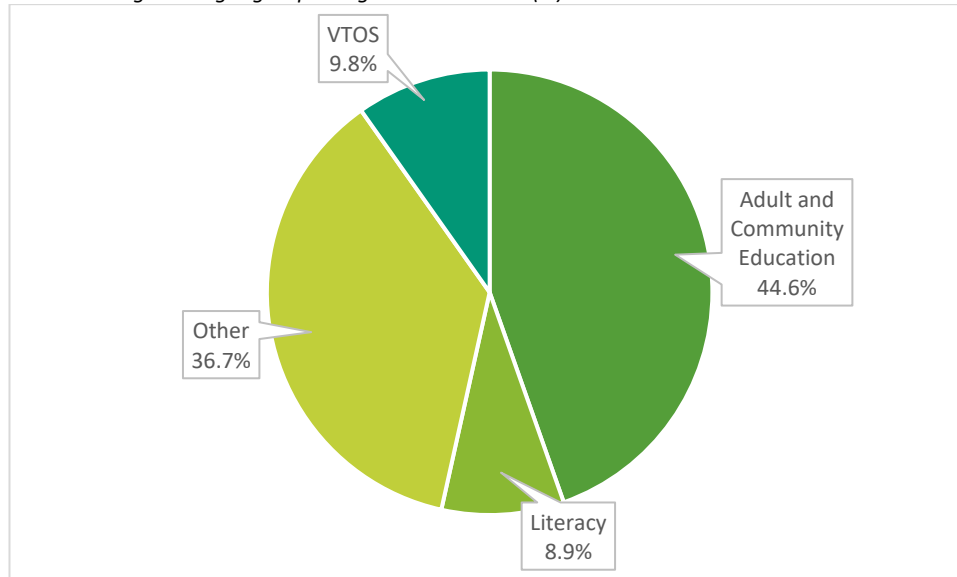
Chart 31. Countries represented amongst non-Irish AEGS one-to-one guidance clients



Target groups

The target groups of the Adult Education Guidance Services were redefined at one point during the relevant years, and this section presents first the original target groups and subsequently the current ones. The original AEGS target groups, as identified in the *White Paper, Learning for Life* (DES 2000) included those attending VTOS, Adult Literacy, and Community Education (which later included BTEI) and those who wished to access those courses. Of all AEGS clients who have been categorised based on these categories, 44.6% participated in Adult and Community Education, and less than 10% in VTOS and Adult Literacy respectively (see *Chart 32*). Meanwhile, the 'other' category makes up 36.7% which is a significant proportion for an unspecified category. It is also worth noting that the provision of VTOS varied across the country. For example, in City of Dublin VEC (CDVEC, now CDETB), VTOS was provided within PLC/Colleges of Further Education, and hence the AEGS of CDVEC did not provide guidance to those attending VTOS, but this was typically not the case elsewhere.

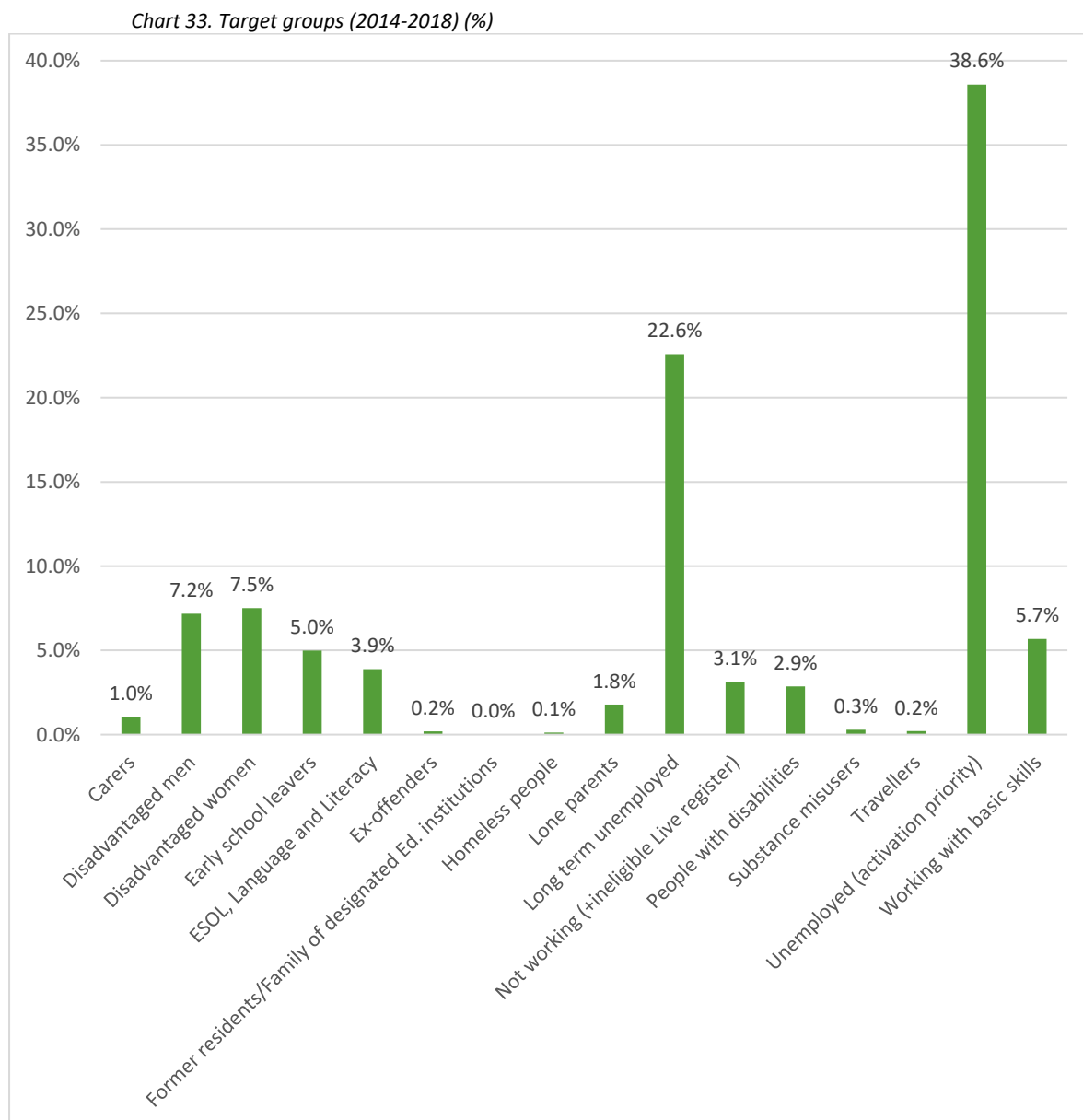
Chart 32. Original target group categories 2004-2013 (%)



In 2012, the AEGS target groups were re-defined to be aligned with the target groups listed in the Departmental BTEI and ALCES operational guidelines, namely “groups that experience particular and acute barriers to participation and are more difficult to engage in the formal learning process” (DES 2012, p.6). As such, clients did not have to be participating in a specific type of Further Education and Training programme to be considered part of an AEGS target group. The groups as listed in the DES AEGI Operational Guidelines include:

- Adults and young people aged over 16 who left school with low or no formal qualifications or low literacy levels
- The unemployed, particularly the priority groups identified as part of the Government’s activation agenda.
- The long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, especially those 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
- Travellers
- Homeless People
- Substance Misusers
- Ex-offenders
- People with Disabilities
- People for whom English is not the mother tongue, who require language and literacy supports
- Former residents of designated education institutions and eligible family members.

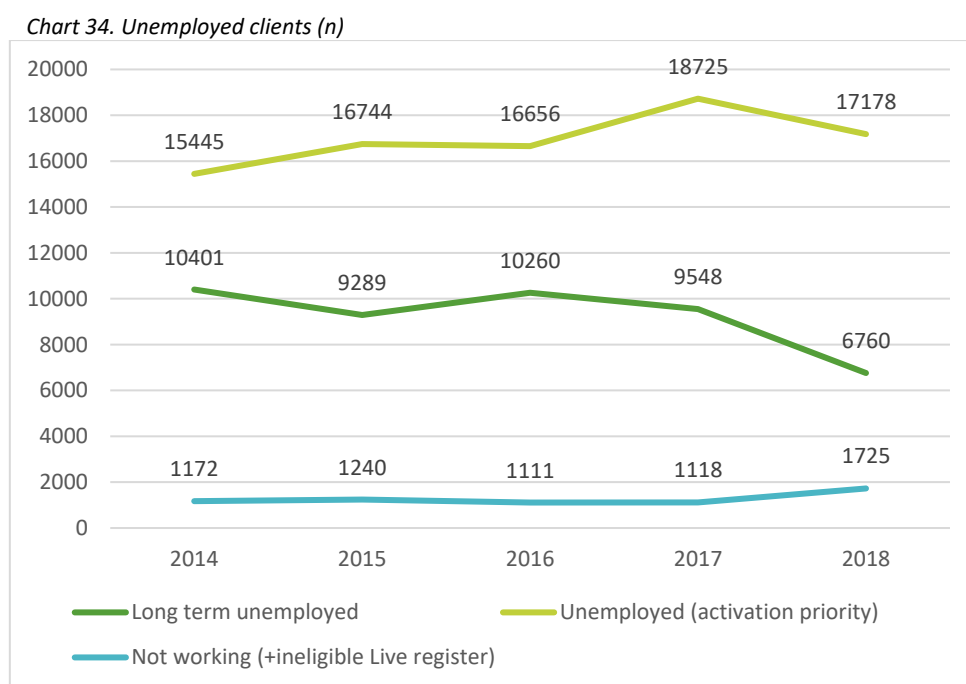
While the DES guidelines came into effect in 2012, the recording of these specific target groups in the AGMS was not instigated until 2014. Hence, there is only data available for the years 2014-2018. It should be noted that when recording client data, AEGS practitioners must choose one *key category* for each client. AEGS practitioners may also select a secondary and third category for the same client, however, only the key category is reported in the national statistics and charts as outlined in Chart 33.



It is evident from the data that the majority of AEGS clients are unemployed, as over 64% of clients are identified as either long-term unemployed, unemployed (activation priority) or not working (but ineligible for the live register). To contextualise this figure, 35.9% of FET learners were unemployed prior to enrolment in 2018, and nearly half (48.7%) of them were long-term unemployed (SOLAS 2019).

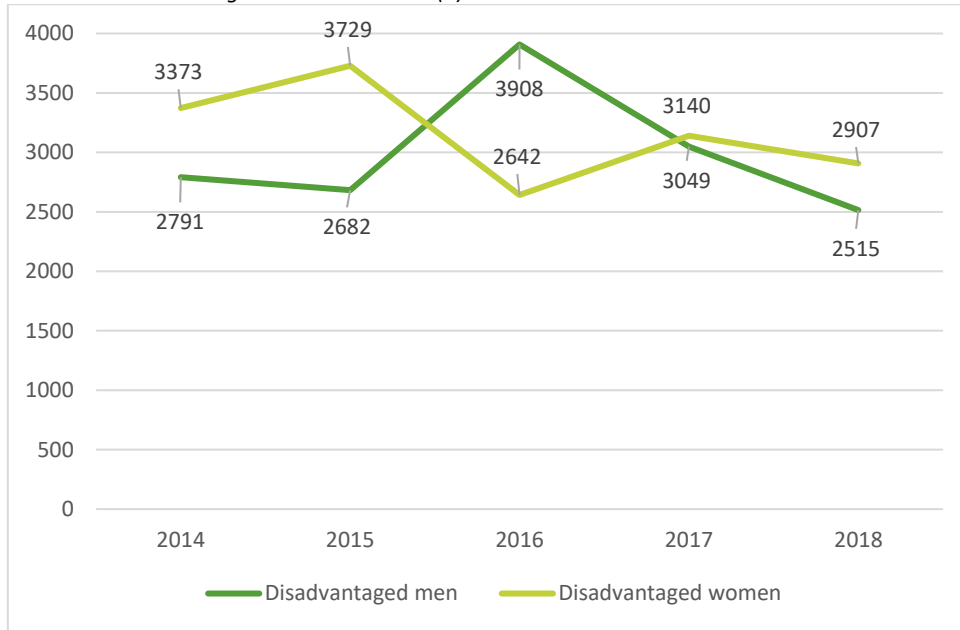
During the years 2014 to 2018, the two largest client categories were Unemployed (activation priority) and long term unemployed (see Chart 34). The term ‘activation priority’ refers to unemployed adults of working age which are part of the Government’s activation agenda, which in turn mirrors policies across many OECD countries for the past decades (Martin 2014; DFSA 2017). As such, it is evident that the AEGS prioritise this cohort.

The number of ‘long term unemployed’ clients has decreased during the period 2016-2018 period, from n10,260 to n6,760. This is a reduction of 34.1% over two years. On the other hand, the number of ‘Unemployed (activation priority)’ has increased by 3.1% during the same time period. It is also relevant to consider that the level of unemployment in Ireland has also decreased in the general population in recent years.



The proportion of clients recorded on the AGMS as ‘disadvantaged men’ and ‘disadvantaged women’ as their identified key target group has fluctuated during the four years discussed here (see Chart 35). This is perhaps one of the broader and unspecified categories as clients categorised differently are either male or female and the type of ‘disadvantage’ is not explicit. It is thereby not conducive to compare and contrast these numbers with FET learner data for example.

Chart 35. Disadvantaged men and women (n)



The number of clients categorised primarily as Early School Leavers (ESL) has gradually decreased, which correlates with CSO data on the general population (CSO *Statbank*). Meanwhile, clients categorised as ‘working with basic skills’ and ‘ESOL language and literacy’ increased somewhat during the 2014-2018-time period (see Chart 36).

Chart 36. ESL, Basic skills & ESOL. Language and Literacy (n)

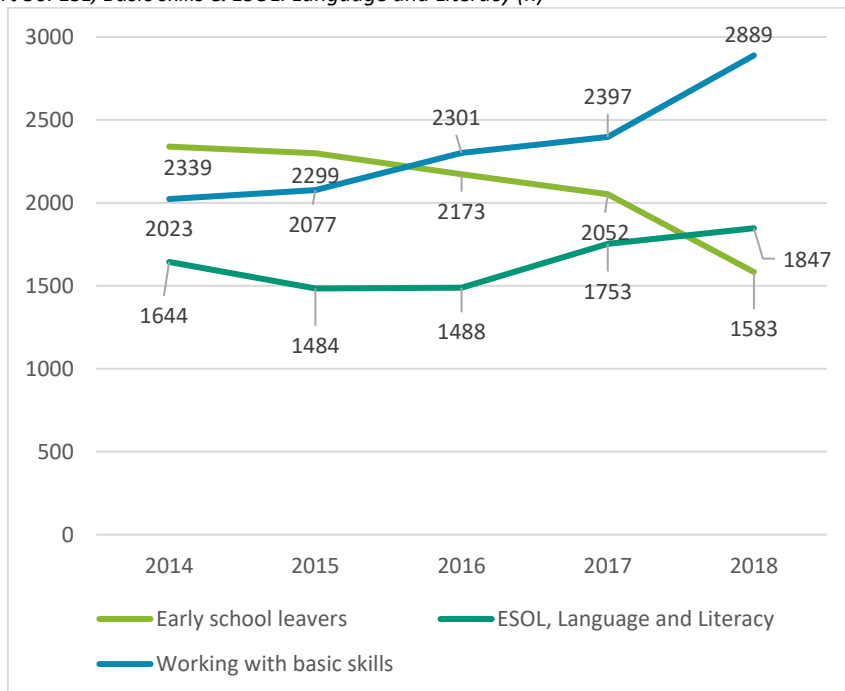


Chart 37 presents the data for the target groups Lone parents, People with disabilities, Travellers and Carers. Firstly, in 2018, the total number of Traveller enrolments in FET was n1,212 (SOLAS 2019). Meanwhile, the total number of Travellers accessing one-to-one guidance in the AEGS in 2018 was n80. Assuming that those n80 AEGI clients with Traveller as their key category in the AGMS were enrolled in FET, they represent 6.6% of the total number of Travellers in FET that year. However, the proportion may be lower as they may not all have been enrolled in FET, or it may be higher, if some AEGS clients who are Travellers were not categorised as such. It may also be worth noting that segregated training provision for Travellers, through Senior Traveller Training Centres was phased out during 2012 as per the National Traveller Education Strategy (DES 2006) and the Value for Money Review of Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres (DES 2008). An integrated FET provision for Travellers replaced previous provisions and included priority places provided under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).

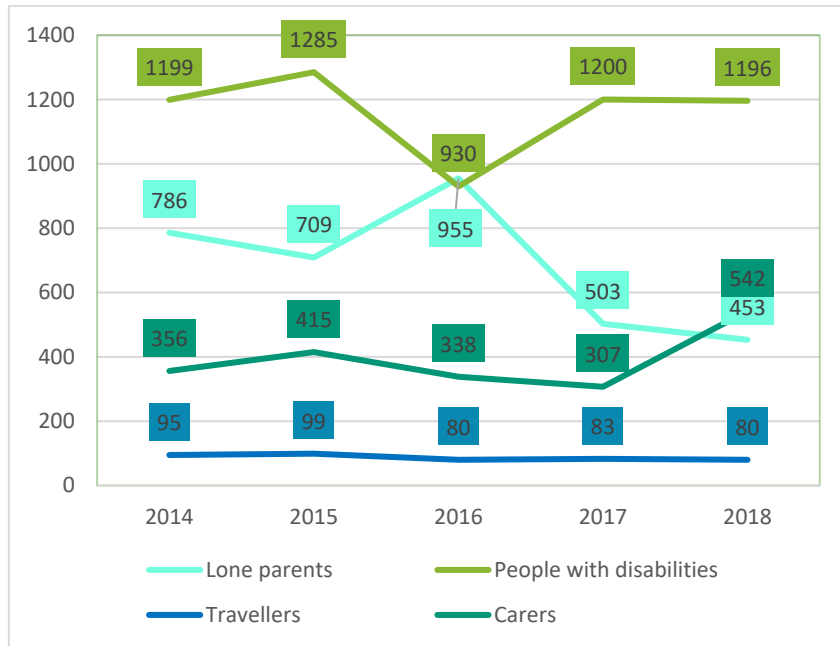
There were n8,644 learners with at least one self-declared disability enrolled in FET programmes in 2018 (4.9% of all FET learners) (SOLAS 2019). This is somewhat lower compared to the 6.2% of the total Higher Education student population in the 17/18 academic year (AHEAD 2019). The number of one-to-one guidance clients identified as 'people with disabilities' was n1196 in the same year (3% of AEGI clients). Whilst this figure (n1196) equates to 13.8% of the total number of FET learners with a self-declared disability, it is not possible to ascertain the true proportion of FET learners with disabilities who accessed the AEGS, for the following reasons:

- Learners with a disability do not always choose to self-declare it.
- Some of the AEGS clients may not be registered FET learners.
- AEGS clients with disabilities may not be categorised as 'people with disabilities' as their *key* target group.
- A significant proportion of FET learners, in particular students with disabilities on PLC courses, may access programme/school-based guidance (ESRI 2018).

In some case studies in the AGMS, it also emerged that guidance counsellors sometimes identify suspected disabilities, in particular learning disabilities through one-to-one guidance provision and subsequently support clients to seek diagnostic services or other supports. As this is only recorded in the qualitative data, it is not possible to ascertain how frequently this occurs. It can, nonetheless, have important and positive implications for clients and their progression (Elftorp *et al.* 2018).

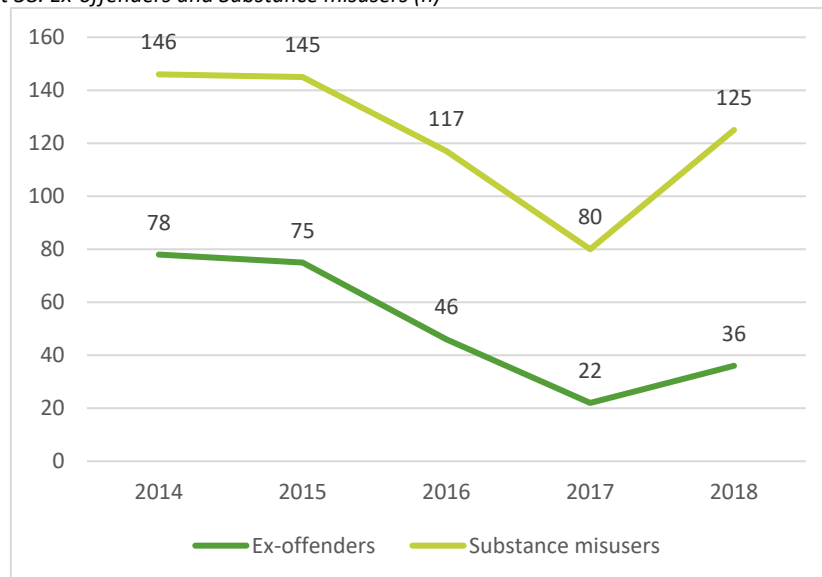
Research suggests that some groups who typically prefer part-time studies, such as lone parents and carers, are better supported and accommodated for financially and structurally in the FET sector compared to Higher Education (Byrne and Murray 2017). The financial supports available to carers and lone parents in FET, such as Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), are accessed through the DEASP / Intreo or LES. This may explain why the numbers of AEGS clients with these target group categories are relatively low in the AGMS data. Furthermore, many BTEA funded programmes are full-time PLC courses where learners have access onsite to a guidance counsellor

Chart 37. Lone parents, People with disabilities, Travellers and Carers (n)



The figures for the two target groups ‘ex-offenders’ and ‘substance misusers’ have followed a similar curve (Chart 38) which is a decrease from 2014 to 2017, and a slight increase in 2018.

Chart 38. Ex-offenders and Substance misusers (n)

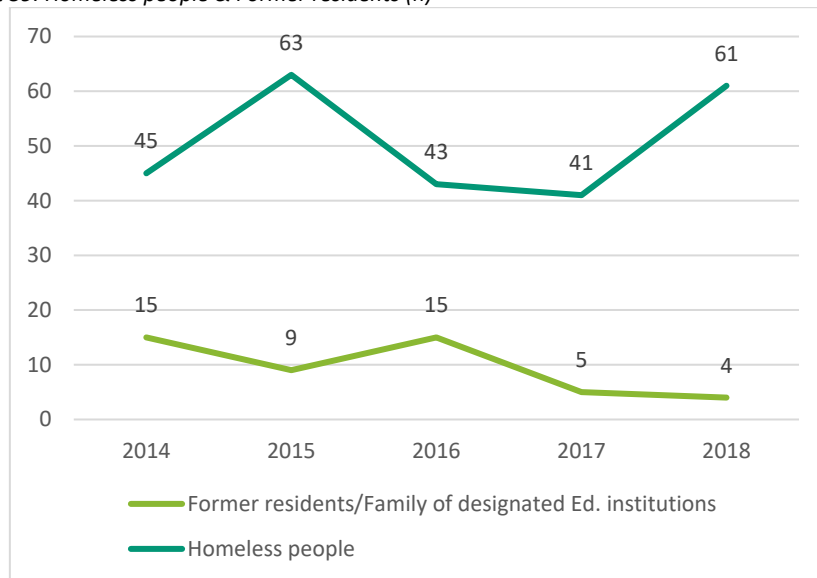


Although the number of homeless people have increased significantly year on year during the 2014-2018 time period (according to CSO and Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government figures), the number of clients with this key category has fluctuated between the low 40s to the mid-60s (see chart 39).

In relation to the target group ‘Former residents of designated education institutions and eligible family members’ the numbers in the AGMS have decreased from n15 to n4. While keeping in mind that the numbers are very low, the decrease from n15 in 2016 to n5 in 2017 and n4 in 2018 may be

related to the extended provision of services from Residential Institutions Survivor Statutory Fund, Caranua, in 2016 which includes counselling and educational supports.

Chart 39. Homeless people & Former residents (n)

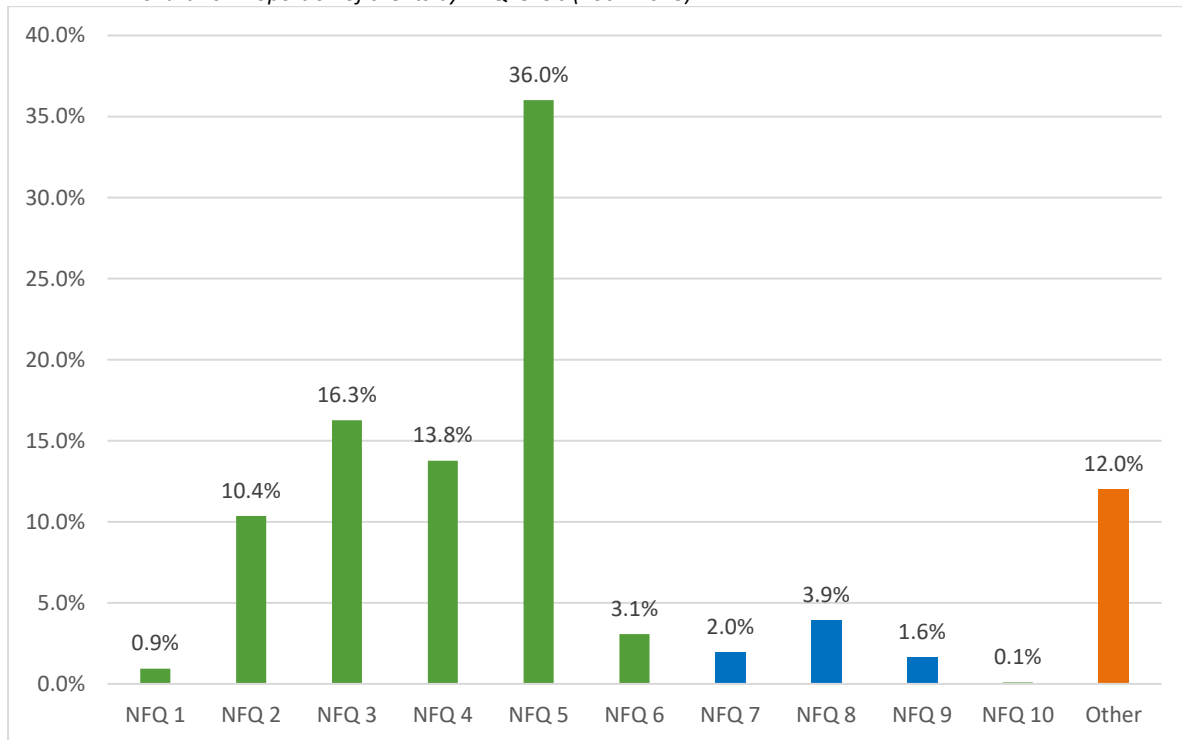


Overall, the target group data suggest that there has been an increasing focus on unemployment and activation groups, which may indicate a reduction in guidance support targeted at some particularly vulnerable groups and literacy and community education programmes.

National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Levels

Practitioners can record the ‘current NFQ level’ of their clients, which refers to the highest educational level achieved at the time of accessing the service. Chart 40 maps out the overall distribution of ‘current NFQ level’ for clients met during the years 2004-2018, where the bars for the primary/post-primary/FET sector levels are green, the higher education levels are blue and the ‘other’ bar is red. More than one third of the clients had NFQ level 5 (36%), which is significantly more than any other NFQ level.

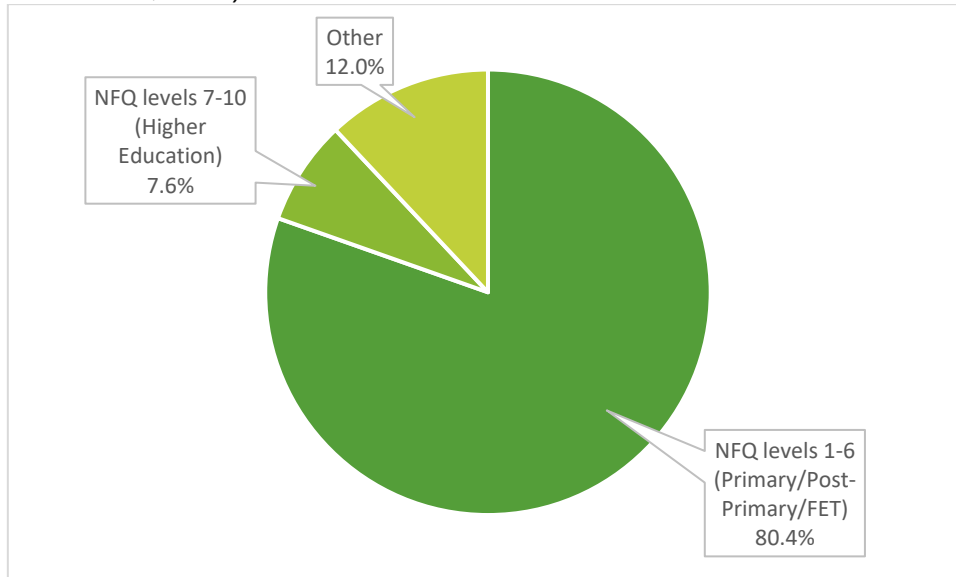
Chart 40. Proportion of clients by NFQ levels (2004-2018)



Overall, the majority (80.4%) of clients had an NFQ level which relates to either primary, post-primary or FET (NFQ levels 1-6), and only 7.6% had a Higher Education qualification (NFQ levels 7-10) (see Chart 41). The ‘other’ category makes up a significant proportion of clients (12%) for an unspecified category, which means that potentially valuable data was not recorded. The research advisory group provided some further insights in relation to the ‘other’ category:

- NFQ levels may not be recorded for ‘pre-entry’ guidance
- NFQ equivalents may not be known for learners with foreign qualifications or those attending ESOL
- NFQ levels for professional, vocational or apprenticeship type qualifications were not clarified at that time
- Adults may only have completed individual modules (not full awards on the NFQ) or they may not remember what level they have achieved to date

Chart 41. NFQ levels by sector



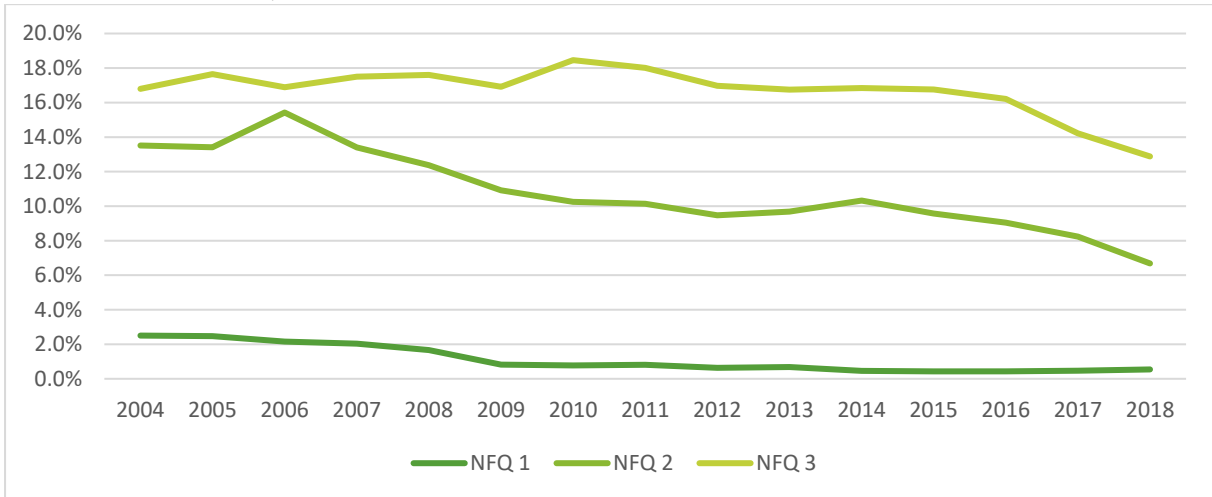
When analysing the data on a year by year basis (see Table in *Appendix C*), a number of trends emerge. Firstly, the proportion of AEGS clients with the three lowest NFQ levels (1, 2 and 3) have a general trend of decreasing over time and those with NFQ level 3 saw the largest decrease over time, with a difference of 5.6 percentage points between the highest and the lowest (see Chart 42).

Awards at these levels (NFQ 1-3) in the FET sector typically focus on basic skills, literacy, personal and practical skills. The decrease in guidance provision at these levels is somewhat surprising in light of the increased participation in literacy training (DES 2013; SOLAS 2014) and guidelines for Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education (ITABE) which recommend strong involvement of AEGS in their provision (IVEA 2012). However, the research advisory group suggested that the vast number of recently unemployed who returned to education after the economic recession in 2008 had this impact on the overall numbers:

Many [recently unemployed adults] were well educated but couldn't get a job and needed to retrain. There seemed to be an urgency to deal with these clients, perhaps as they were less used to being out of work. Those with levels 1-3 were often already engaged in adult literacy etc and were content to continue with their studies there.

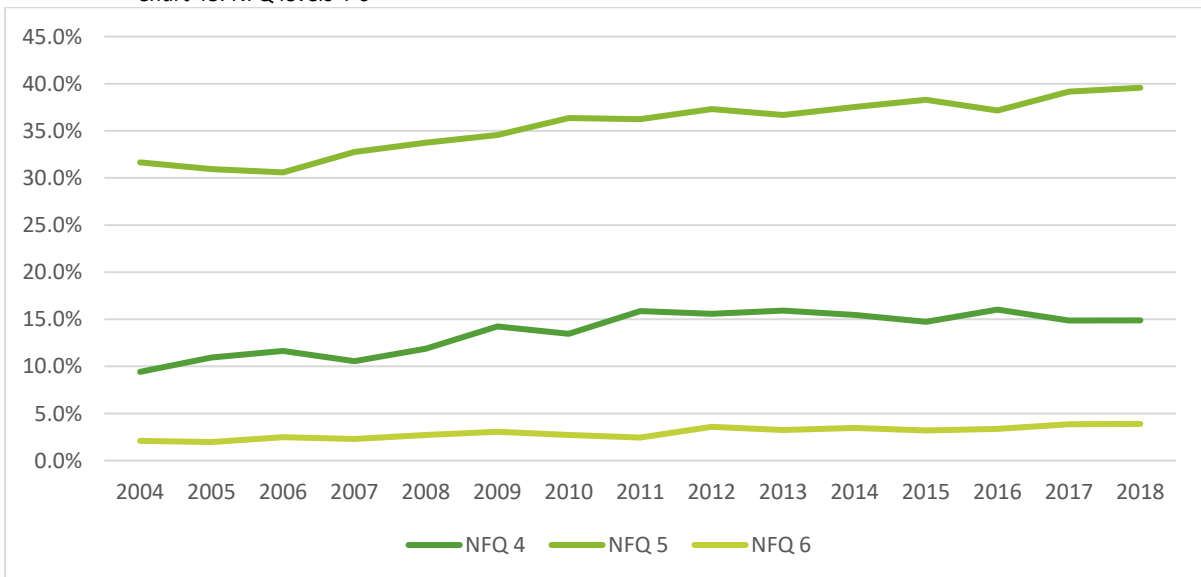
It is reasonable to assume that a number of factors may have been at play, such as the economic recession, the 'activation priority' and the FET reform with more local decision making (DFSA 2014; NALA 2020).

Chart 42. NFQ levels 1-3



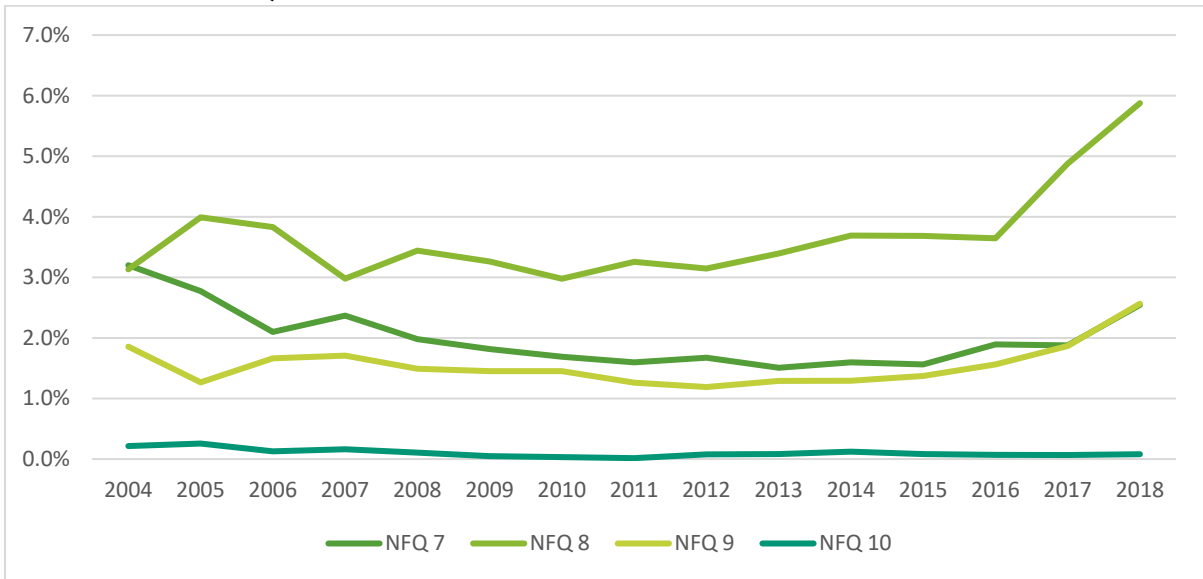
The proportion of clients with NFQ levels 4, 5 and 6 have all increased to varying degrees over time, and level 5 saw the largest increase with a 9.6 percentage points' difference between the highest and the lowest (see chart 43). The popularity of level 5 awards also correlates with statistics in the general population (CSO 2016).

Chart 43. NFQ levels 4-6



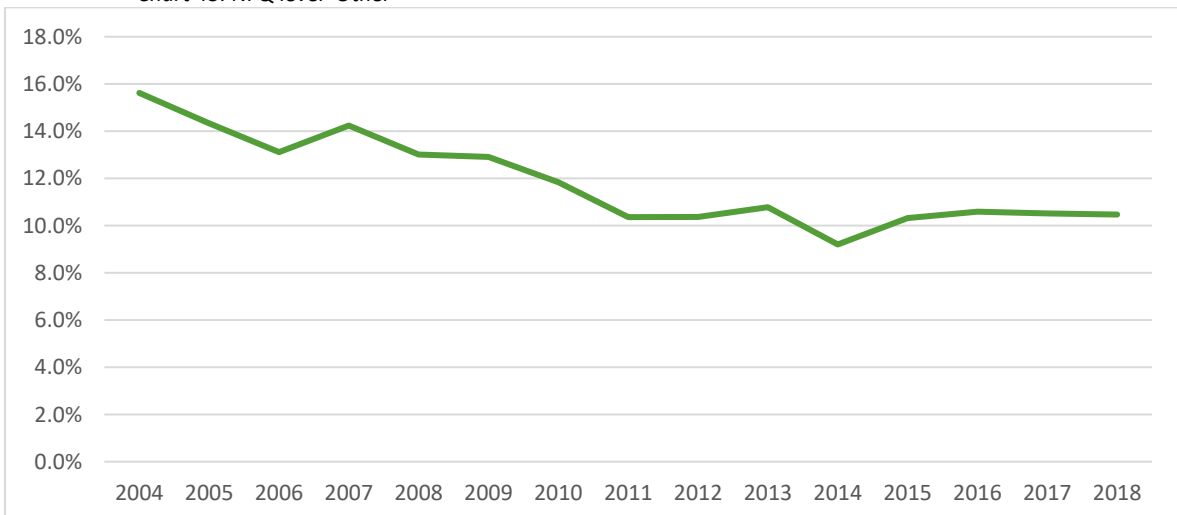
Whilst the number of clients with an NFQ levels 8 and 9 have increased over time, NFQ level 7 has decreased (see chart 44). This trend correlates with Higher Education trends generally in Ireland as undergraduate students increasingly often undertake honours degrees (NFQ level 8) rather than ordinary degrees (level 7) (HEA 2019). Meanwhile, the proportion of clients with NFQ level 10 has remained below 0.5% throughout the years. Such clients with Higher Education qualifications would typically be included within the key categories of Unemployed or People with Disabilities.

Chart 44. NFQ levels 7-10



Finally, the proportion of clients categorised as **‘Other’** has fluctuated but with the general trend of decreasing over the years, and has ranged from 15.6% in 2004 and its lowest point at 9.2% in 2014 (diff. of 6.4 percentage points) (see Chart 45). The research advisory group advised that the category may include clients from other countries or clients in community education with no clearly defined NFQ level.

Chart 45. NFQ level ‘Other’

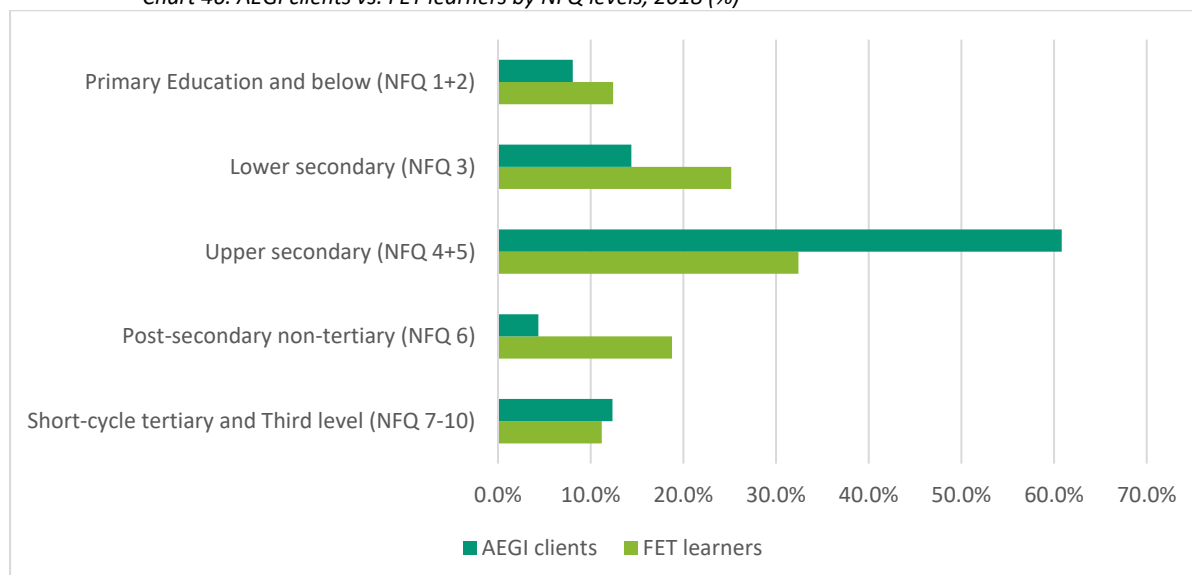


SOLAS data is available for the year 2018 in relation to NFQ levels of FET learners and Chart 46 contrasts SOLAS data with AGMS data for that year. In 2018, 12.4% of AEGS clients had an NFQ level 7-10 (Higher Education), compared to 11.2% of FET learners (SOLAS 2019). However, the main OVERARCHING RESEARCH ON DATA GATHERED IN DES/SOLAS/NCGE ADULT GUIDANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF THE ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE INITIATIVE 2004-2018, Published December 2020

difference relates to NFQ levels 3, 4, 5 and 6. NFQ Level 6 is to a large extent PLC provision, where there generally is programme guidance available, thereby making AEGS services less relevant to NFQ level 6 FET learners. The only NFQ levels which are significantly overrepresented in the AEGS data, (compared to the overall FET participants) are NFQ levels 4 and 5. This is likely related to the fact that many adults completing NFQ Level 5 courses in adult and community based education require guidance counselling towards the end of their course in order to plan and prepare for the next major transition in their lives, to the labour market or to Higher Education for example.

Furthermore, the research advisory group also highlighted that an increased range of upskilling options have emerged in recent years, such as Apprenticeships, Traineeships and Springboard courses. This may have led to a decrease in VTOS participation, where entry criteria are based on the individual being in receipt of specific DEASP payments.

Chart 46. AEGI clients vs. FET learners by NFQ levels, 2018 (%)



Overall trends in the client demographic data

The most significant trends and changes over time identified in the demographic data relate to age, target groups and NFQ levels. The key trends include:

- Age profile is increasingly younger
- Target groups increasingly focused on activation and unemployment
- NFQ levels increasingly higher with NFQ level 5 being overrepresented

Notwithstanding the overlap between many target groups, the data indicate that the increased focus on Activation and Unemployment, in both policy and practice, may have resulted in a reduction in guidance provision to older adults and literacy programme participants as well as other learners at NFQ Levels 1-3, which are often the most marginalised groups. The gradual reduction in AEGS staff during the same time period may have exacerbated this process as staff likely would have had to prioritise which client groups to target.

A contextual factor which is important to consider in relation to the demographic groups represented within the AEGS client data, is that there are other providers of guidance within FET. For example, a majority of PLC schools and colleges provide programme guidance counselling (93% according to ESRI, 2018). Additionally, non-AEGS and hourly contracted guidance in different areas of FET may also impact on which client groups access from the services of the AEGS. However, the non-AEGS guidance provision appears to be ad-hoc with significant variation across the country (DES 2014; Hearne et al. 2019). For instance, it appears some VTOS learners access programme specific (non-AEGS) guidance which may explain the low uptake of AEGS guidance for this group (9.8% during 2004-2013). However, further investigation into how and where some FET learners do, or do not, access guidance seems warranted.

Client progression

This section presents AGMS data relating to both tracking of clients' progression and the barriers clients face in relation to progression.

Tracking Intended and Actual Progression

The 'National Intended Progression' numbers reflect the client's stated intended progression or lifelong learning path at the start of their engagement with the guidance service. "Actual progression" can only be recorded following a formal tracking process or further meetings or interactions with each client.

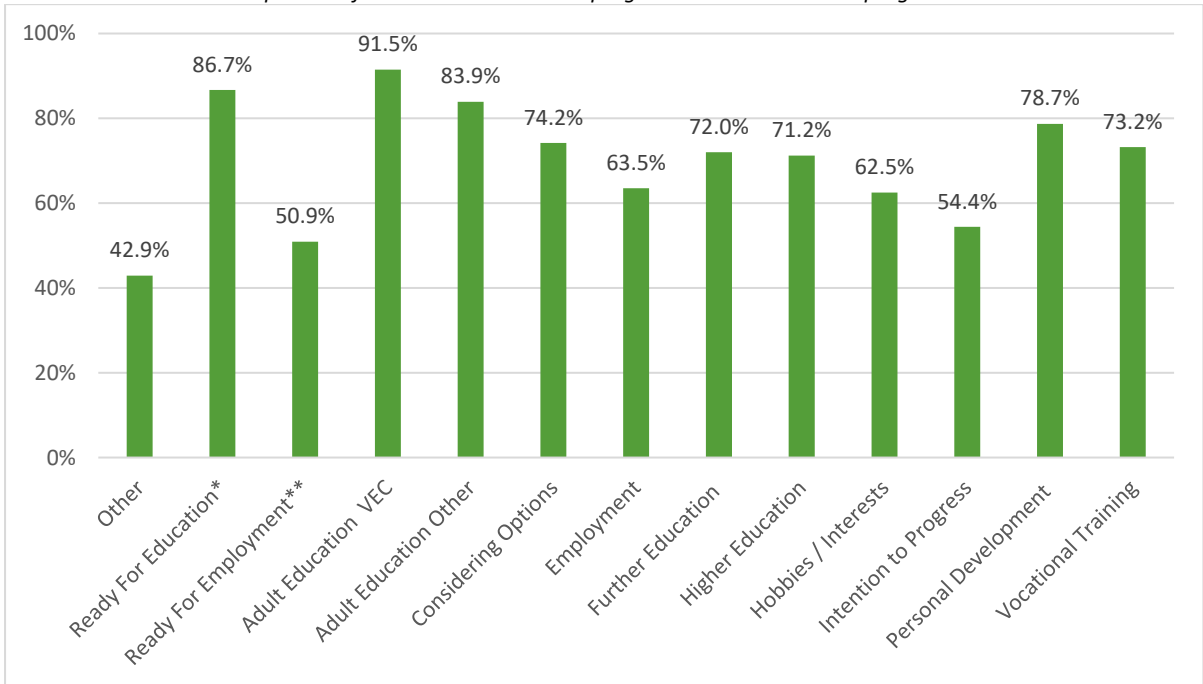
Only a small proportion of clients where 'Intended progression' is recorded, also has 'Actual progression' data (22.9%) which is presented here. It is important to note that the limited tracking of clients' progression may be due to the limited resources available in the services. The challenges of gathering client progression data may also be enhanced by the fact that guidance is provided across a wide range of educational settings and through outreach.

To explore where clients *actually* progressed in relation to where they *intended* to progress, the data needs to be analysed on a case by case basis. By doing that, we can see the rate of which clients' intentions matched their actual progression (see Chart 47). The progression 'destination' which had the highest proportion of matches is 'Adult Education VEC' at 91.5%. In contrast, only half (50.9%) of those whose intended progression was recorded as 'ready for employment' actually progressed to employment.

Being able to track client progression was a feature of the AGMS which AEGS guidance counsellors were keen to include. However, the purpose of tracking progression is more practical than statistical, as it allows the practitioner to follow up with the client in relation to their progression. In other words, it is important to recognise that the client progression feature in the AGMS is useful for practitioners and in their work with individual clients, but cannot confidently be used to *statistically* evaluate the effectiveness of guidance interventions.

Furthermore, we cannot assume that a lack of correlation between intended and actual progression is positive or not as such conclusions require significantly more context. Guidance counselling theory and practice recognise the value in many different types of progression, not only linear upwards progression (Savickas 2011; McNair 2015).

Chart 47. Proportion of clients where intended progression matches actual progression



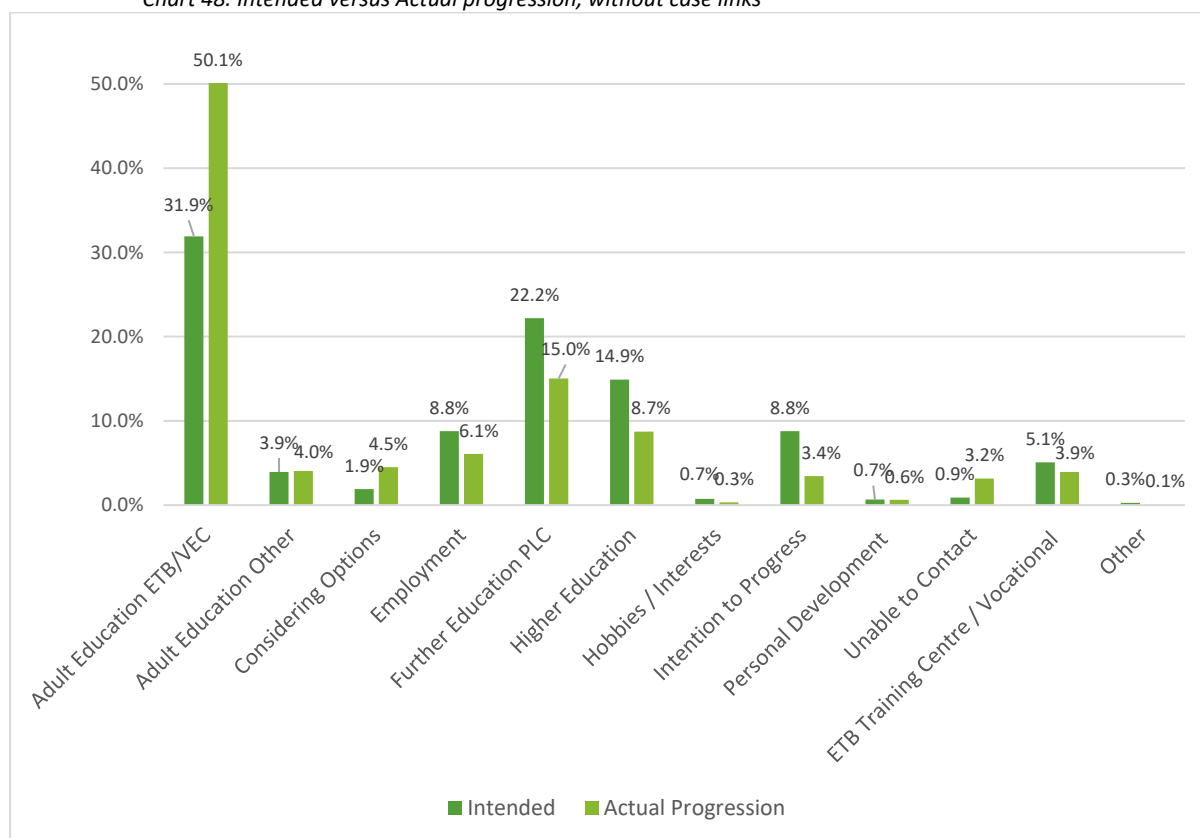
*86.7% of those whose intended progression was 'ready for education' has progressed to some form of education, including FET and HE. .

**50.9% of those whose intended progression was 'ready for employment' had progressed to employment.

On the following page, Chart 48⁶ maps intended versus actual progression, but without any links to the individual clients. In other words, it does not show if those who intended to progress to employment were the ones who actually did, as outlined in Chart 47. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note the contrast between the different types of data as it suggests that guidance provision may have a positive impact in terms of encouraging adults to consider and engage in education.

⁶ Please note that 'Further Education PLC' in Chart 48 refers to what is currently more frequently called 'Colleges of Further Education'.

Chart 48. Intended versus Actual progression, without case links



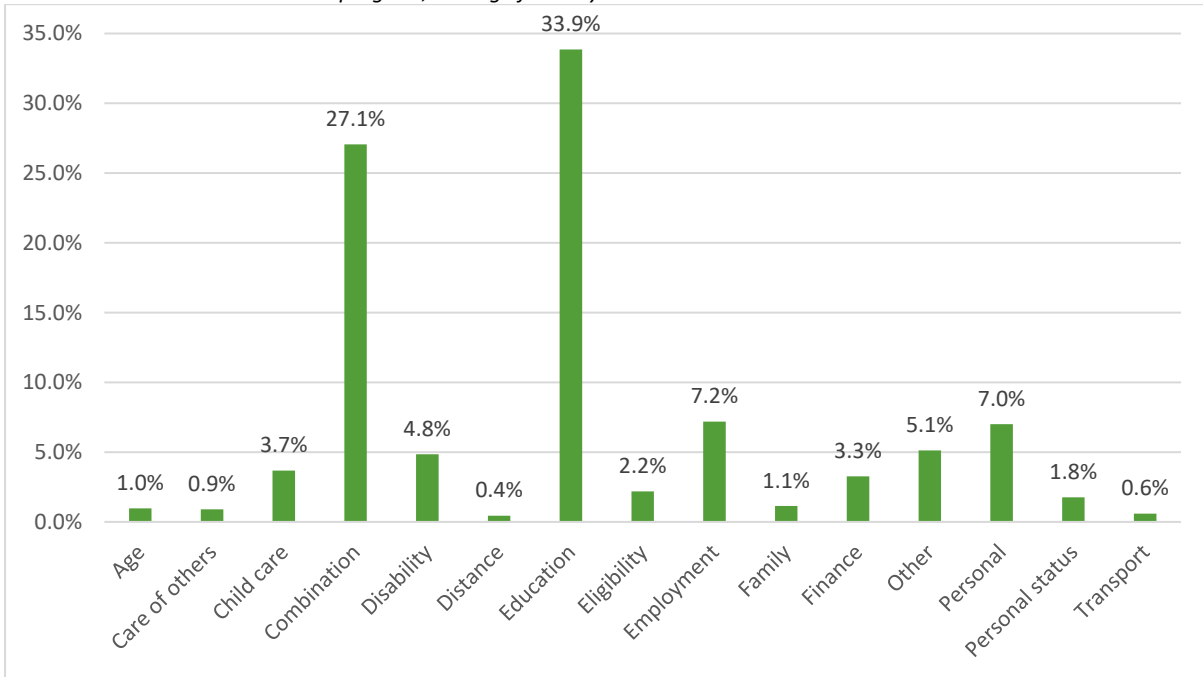
Barriers

The current AGMS categories of barriers are largely situational barriers, meaning that they stem from a person's personal circumstances. In contrast, previous research (Amarach/Mooney & O'Rourke 2017), on barriers in the FET sector are based on qualitative data and a different conceptualisation of barriers which means that the findings are not comparable to the AGMS data presented here. They categorised barriers as "motivational/dispositional, economic/social welfare, organisational and informational/guidance" (ibid. p.1).

Nonetheless, the data provides valuable insights into the clients who access AEGS. The barriers to progression which clients face have been recorded in the AGMS to varying degrees. In 2004, barriers were identified for 32.2% of one-to-one guidance clients. In 2008, the figure had increased to 37.6% and by 2018, it was 49.4%.

Whilst adult clients typically face numerous compounded barriers, the AGMS allows practitioners to record only one barrier for each client, although there is an option to choose 'Combination'. Overall, and with a substantial margin, the two most prevalent barriers for clients have been 'education' (33.9%) and 'combination' (27.1%). See Chart 49 for the average proportion within the total client data.

Chart 49. Barriers to progress, average for the years 2004-2018



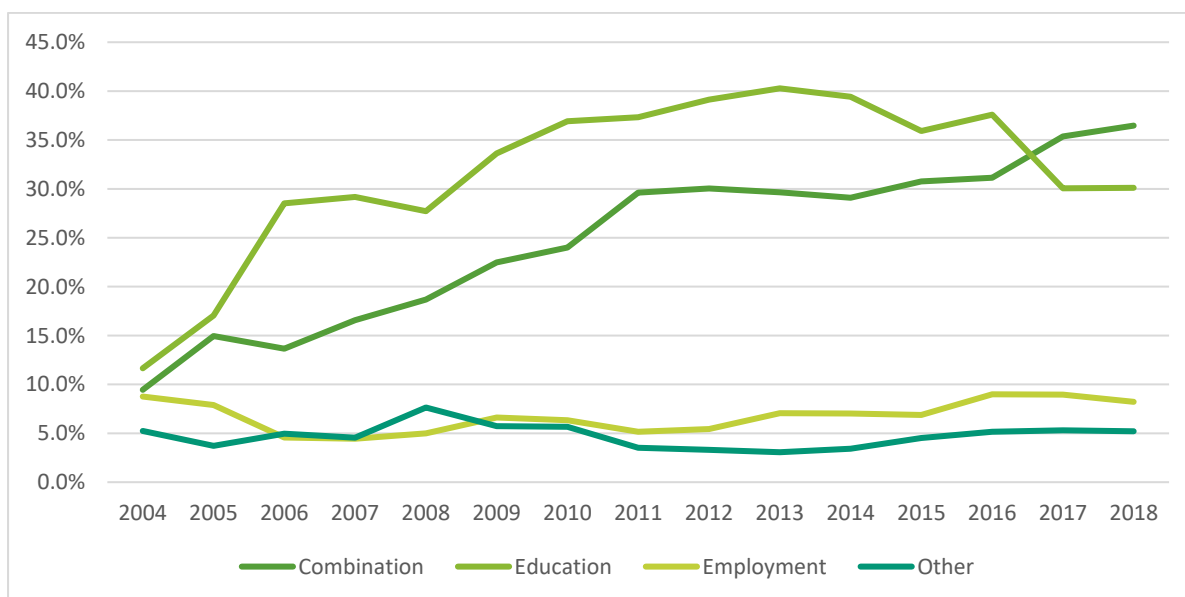
The data has also been interrogated further, in relation to how the prevalence of barriers have changed over time and this is presented in Charts 50-52.

‘Education’ was the most prevalent barrier from 2004-2016, during which time it saw a significant increase and reached its peak in 2013 at 40.3%. However, ‘Combination’ was the most prevalent barrier in 2017 and 2018, and it also saw a significant increase, from 9.4% in 2004 to 36.5% in 2018. There are also references in the AGMS qualitative data suggesting that the complexity of clients’ needs has increased in recent years. This relates to clients who face a multitude of significant barriers such as mental health issues, addiction, and financial and social disadvantage. As the interpretation of ‘education’ as a barrier may vary in different AEGS, it is not possible to ascertain the reason for the increase. However, the research advisory group suggests that some practitioners may interpret it as an eligibility issue.

‘Employment’ was not a particularly prevalent barrier during the years of high unemployment, representing 4.6% in 2006 and 2007 respectively, but it rose to 9% in 2016 and 2017 when unemployment figures were much lower.

The category ‘Other’ has fluctuated over the years, with the lowest figure in 2013 (3.1%) and the highest in 2008 (7.6%), and an average of 5.1% over the 2004-2018 years.

Chart 50. Combination, Education, Employment, Other

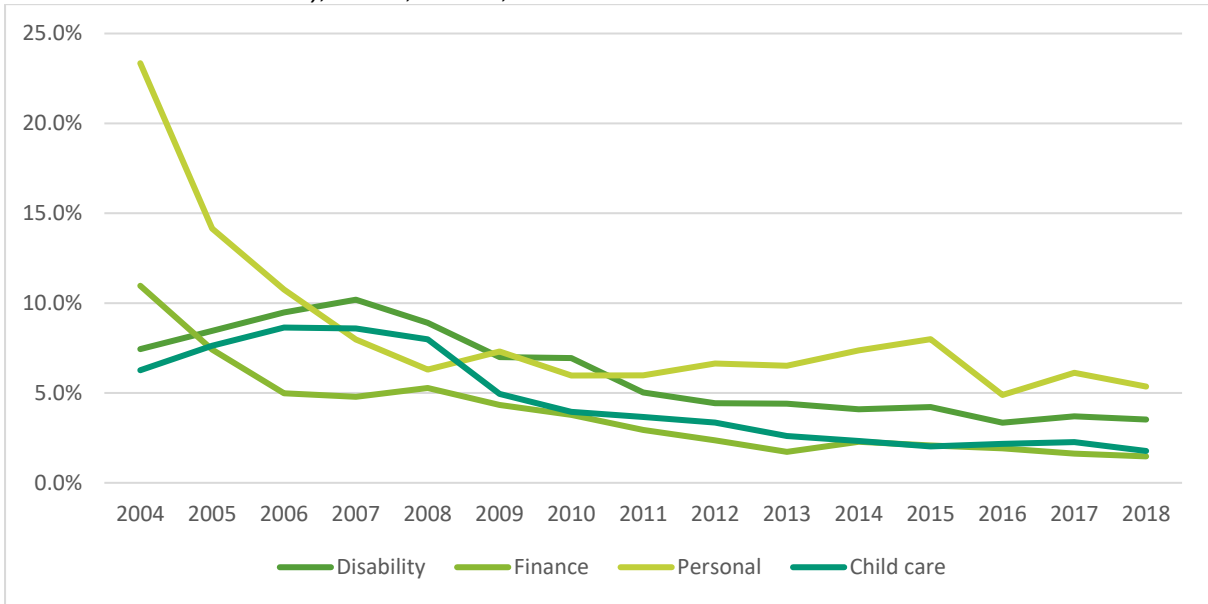


‘Personal’ barriers have seen the most significant decrease since 2004, as it was the most prevalent barrier in 2004 at 23.3% but only represents 5.4% in 2018. This may be due to increased concerns for privacy as well as a recognition of how personal issues impact on all aspects of life and thereby justifying the use of ‘combination’ as a more appropriate category.

‘Disability’ represented 10.2% of all barriers in 2007, but gradually decreased and was at its lowest for the relevant time period, at 3.5% in 2018. In contrast, participation in FET and HE for people with a disability has gradually increased over these years (AHEAD 2019). It is also interesting to note that more clients have ‘disability’ recorded as a barrier, than the number of clients in the key target group ‘people with disability’ (which represented 2.9% of all clients on average for the years 2014-2018). However it is important to recognise that on the one hand, having a disability does not necessarily constitute a barrier, and on the other hand, an undiagnosed disability can prove to be a challenging but unidentified barrier and thereby not recorded on the AGMS as the key target category.

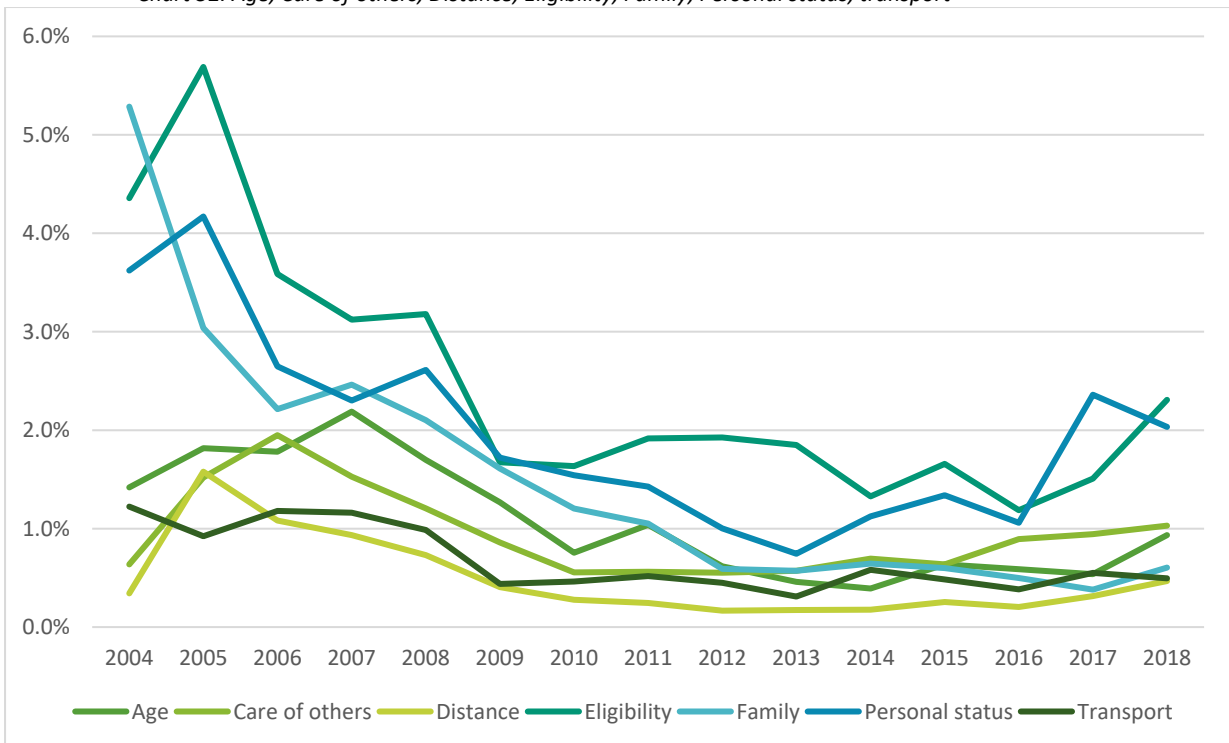
The proportion of clients with ‘Childcare’ barriers has gradually decreased, from its highest in 2006 (8.6%) to its lowest in 2018 (1.8%). ‘Finance’ followed a similar trend, from 11% in 2004 to 1.8% in 2018.

Chart 51. Disability, Finance, Personal, Childcare



‘Age’ as a barrier has decreased over time, possibly as a result of the age profile of the client population having decreased during the same period (see Client Demographics). Similarly, ‘Eligibility’, ‘Family’ and ‘Personal status’ have also decreased over time, but have remained on or below 5.7%. Finally, ‘Care of others’, ‘Distance’ and ‘Transport’ have all remained near 1% throughout the years.

Chart 52. Age, Care of others, Distance, Eligibility, Family, Personal status, transport



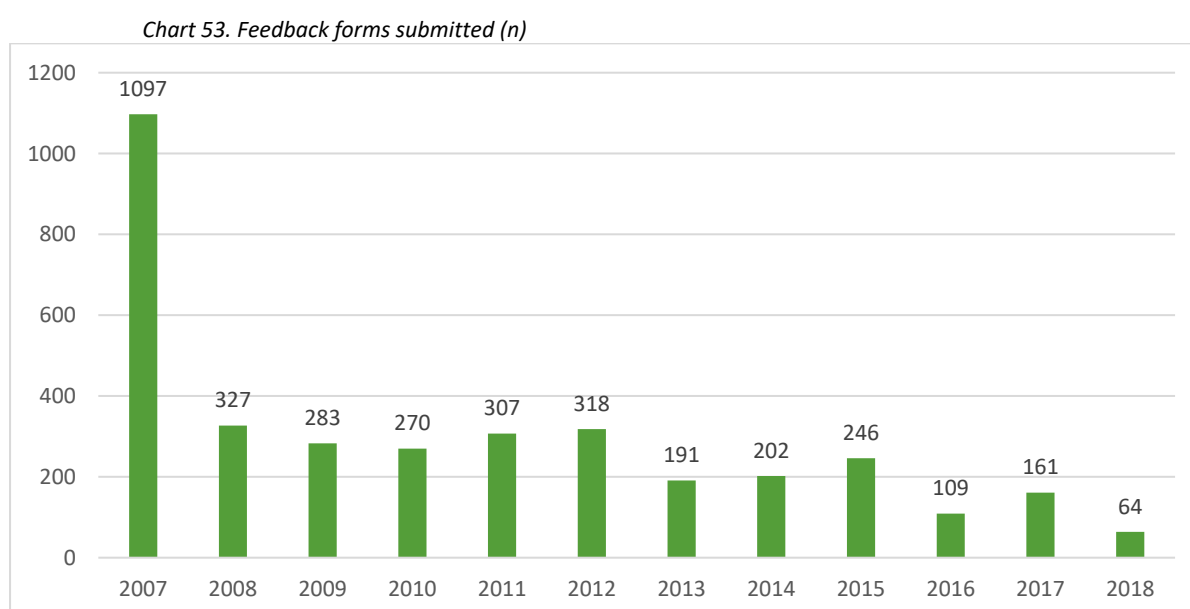
Whilst the AGMS data does not reveal why some barriers have decreased and some have increased, it is reasonable to assume that the increase in availability of FET courses and programmes, as well as DEASP allowances and schemes have helped to reduce some obstacles, such as eligibility and financial barriers.

Client Feedback

Client feedback has been recorded biannually in the AGMS during the years 2007-2018. Recording and listening to the voice of the clients, in the shape of feedback on the service provided, is a key component of quality assurance in both national and international guidance counselling policy (ELGPN 2015; National Guidance Forum 2007; OECD 2004). The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) outlines that citizen involvement is essential in order to ensure improved user experience, develop effective and efficient services, strengthen accountability, and contribute to social justice. One AEGS also emphasises the role of client feedback in reflective practice when they state that: *“It is the cornerstone of our informed reflective practice and is documented in our End of Year Evaluation and Team Reflective Practice”*.

The number of client feedback forms which have been submitted in the AGMS are presented in Chart 53. The first year, a total of n1,097 forms were submitted, but less than a third of that number are recorded in the following years, with the lowest number in 2018 (n64). Initially, AEGS were required to issue and report on Client feedback forms. However, from 2012 onwards, they were required to report on the AEGS activities developed and based on Client feedback rather than the individual responses gathered.

It is important to recognise that there are significant challenges in gathering client feedback due to the dispersed delivery of guidance across the FET sector. Furthermore, guidance is available to clients post-completion of FET and to the general public and as clients move on to different sectors, feedback may prove more difficult to collect. In particular, the pressures of working within a service with limited resources and a reduction in staffing, may have mitigated against coherent and regular gathering of client feedback as the AEGS staff also have to prioritise other tasks and activities.



The client feedback questionnaire which were completed anonymously consisted of seven quantitative questions, and the results presented in charts 54-60 include data from all relevant years, i.e. 2004-2018.

Chart 54. Question 1.

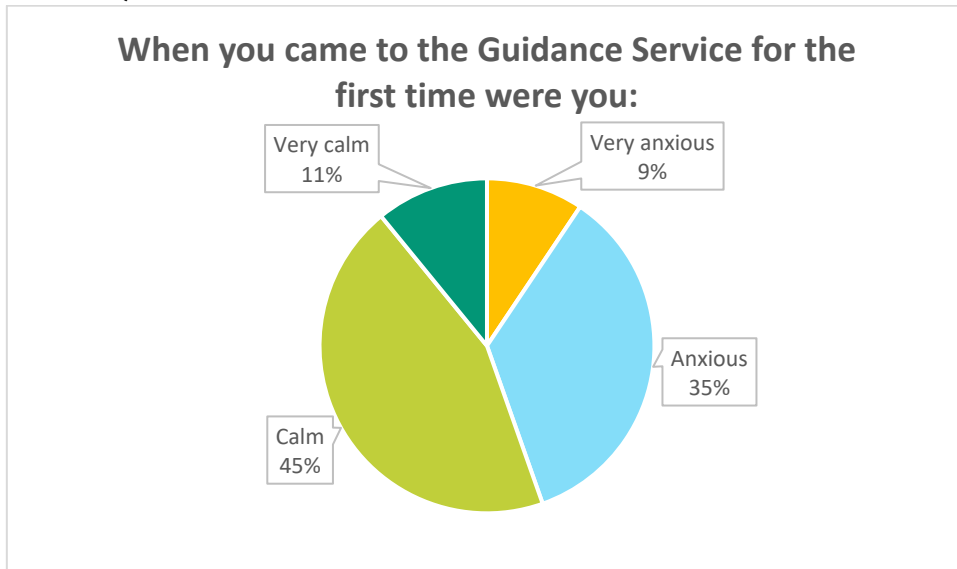


Chart 55. Question 2.

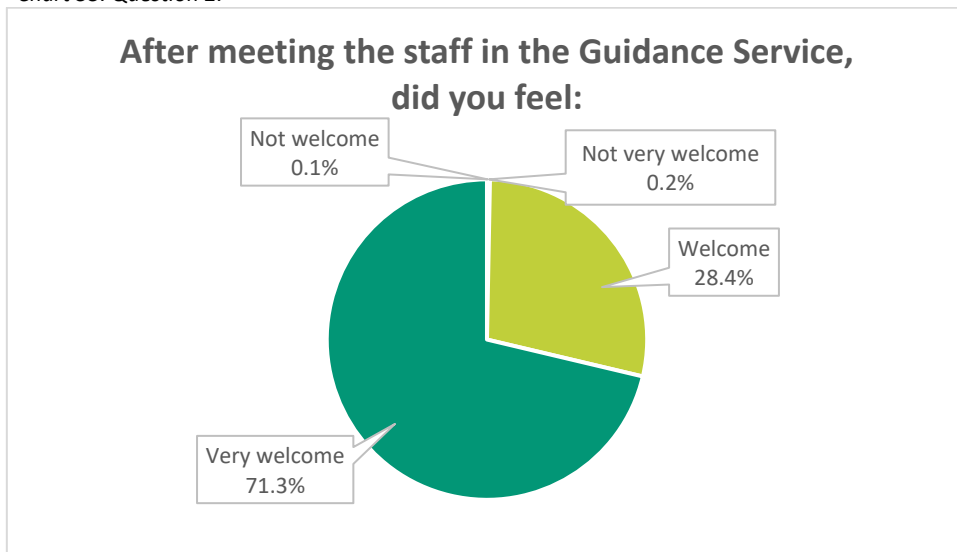


Chart 56. Question 3.

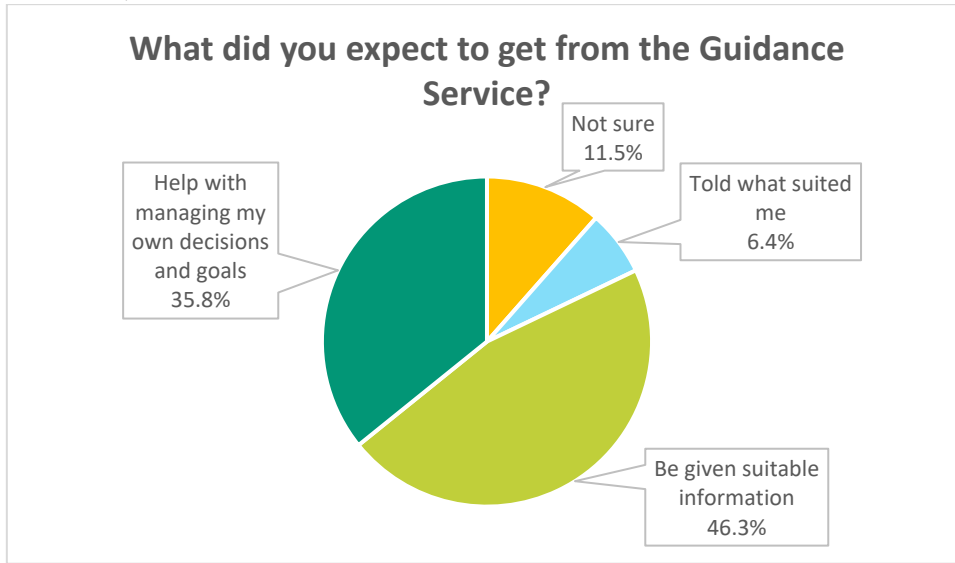


Chart 57. Question 4.

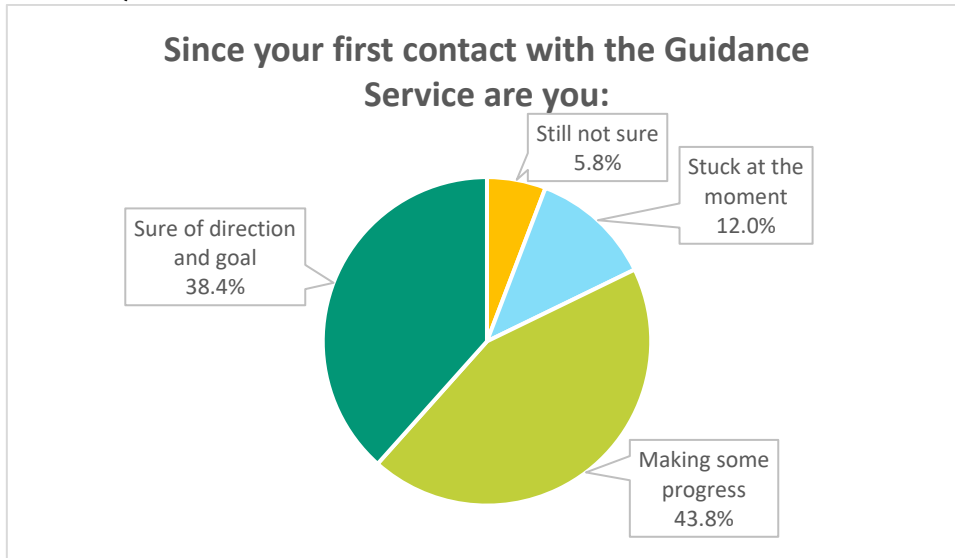


Chart 58. Question 5.

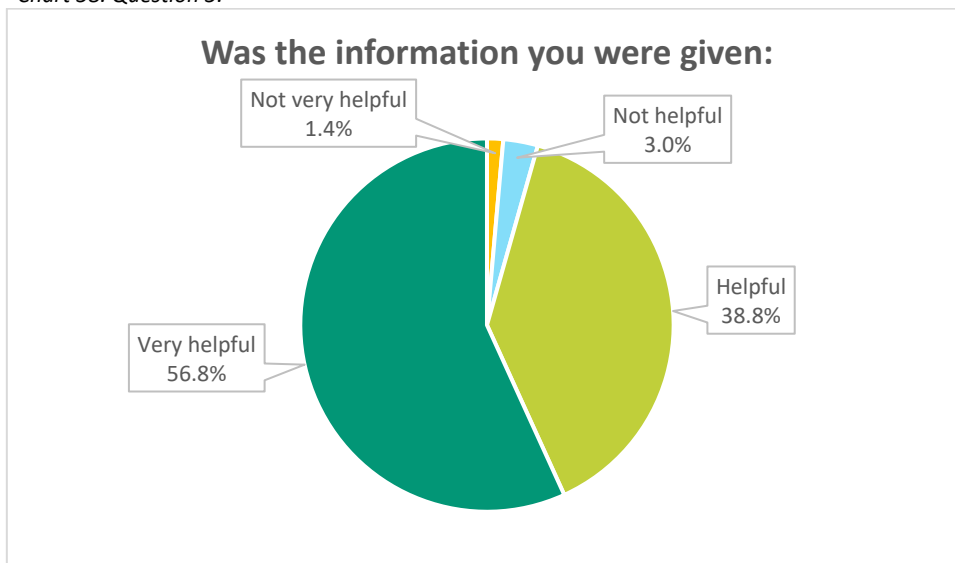


Chart 59. Question 6.

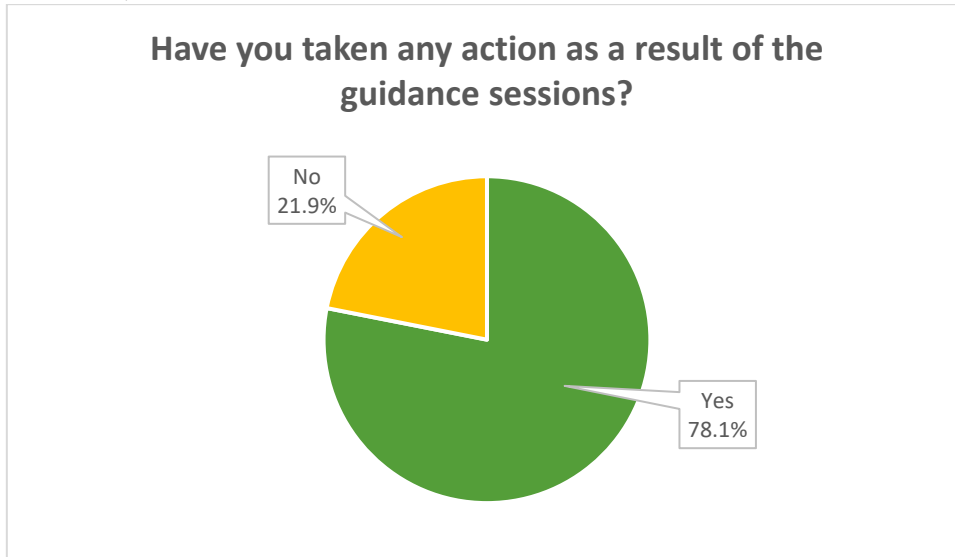


Chart 60. Question 7.



There were also two open ended questions in the questionnaire, and the results have been subject to content analysis and are presented here:

What did you find helpful about the Guidance Service?

The responses to this question can be summarised under two categories. Firstly, the professional qualities in the guidance counsellor was emphasised as key to their satisfaction with the service. The following response from a client encapsulates what numerous clients stated:

My GC was extremely kind to me when I started seeing her and so helpful. What I really liked was she made no judgements but listened and encouraged me and led me in a way that I made all the decisions about my future myself. I was in touch with her a good few times mostly when I was in doubt and she always perked me up. I also got

a little personal counselling which was suggested to me and it also helped me in my life. I really found the service so helpful.

Other recurring comments under this category include:

- *I felt relaxed and at ease when talking to the guidance counsellor.*
- *I received non-judgemental support and the guidance counsellors were not pushing an agenda (e.g. filling courses or promoting specific colleges). This was noted as a contrast to experiences of accessing employment and income support services in particular.*
- *My autonomy was encouraged*
- *I felt listened to, that I was taken seriously, within a safe space.*
- *I felt that the guidance counsellor had a genuine interest in me and my progress.*
- *I was not rushed, the guidance counsellors took their time.*

Secondly, the practical supports and outcomes were commented on in a number of ways:

- *My knowledge of suitable and local options was increased.*
- *It led to outcomes such as getting onto a suitable course or gaining employment.*
- *I received relevant, accurate, local and reliable information.* This was noted as a contrast to accessing information online or from family and friends for example.
- *I received practical CV/Job interview help and practice.* Examples such as mock interviews and CV workshops were mentioned.
- *It led to increased self-awareness and more appropriate actions and career paths.* Both the process of talking through a dilemma and psychometric testing were mentioned as particularly useful in this regard.

What did you think could be improved in the Adult Education Guidance Service?

The most common response to this question was that nothing needed to be improved, or *'don't know'*. After content analysis of the remaining responses, the following themes emerged:

- **Physical premises** – e.g. not accessible for people with disabilities, offices were small, it felt like there was no privacy etc.
- **Visibility of service** – the need to advertise and promote the service to reach more adults as many found it *'by accident'* or through word of mouth.
- **Availability** – some suggested longer opening hours, more staff, more time for each client, and more emphasis and time for follow-up guidance.
- **More outreach** – more frequent availability in rural communities and towns
- **Activities** – e.g. initial assessments of literacy skills, information about other services
- **Expanded service provision** – suggestions to introduce e.g. online guidance, facilitated work placements and employer engagements, and provision of information about current vacancies on the labour market.

Client feedback informing practice

In the biannual qualitative returns for the years 2012 to 2018, the services were asked to describe how client feedback had informed practice and service provision. The question was: *In what ways has client feedback, which you have received in the last six-month period, informed your current practice? Please provide two to four bullet point examples.*

The response rate to this particular question gradually decreased from n37 in 2012 to n16 in 2018 and the average response rate was n26.9 (68.9%). Themes emerged in the data and are outlined together with some examples here:

- Justification and Recognition
- Informing content
- Lobbying & Advocating
- Client Interaction & Communication
- Barriers to acting on client feedback

Justification and Recognition

The most prominent response was that positive feedback provided a mandate and justification to continue specific practices. Several services wrote that positive feedback from a specific group, such as VTOS, led to continued support for that particular group. And the positive feedback on one-to-one interventions also confirmed that it is an essential part of the model of guidance provided in the AEGS.

It was also felt that the positive feedback provided a sense of recognition of their work, and it helped motivate AEGS practitioners to continue to provide a quality service. One service stated:

The one thing positive feedback always gives is confidence. When somebody says, "much appreciated", "you've been a great help", "you're the first place I've come that's being able to give me all the information" or "can I send my partner/friend into you" it continues to give you confidence which in turn helps you do a good job (2017)

Informing content

Services have described how they adjust the types of workshops and information sessions they organise based on trends they notice in client requests. For example, during times of low unemployment clients primarily requested information about employment and career related provision as well as part-time and up-skilling courses. In contrast, during periods with high unemployment, requests for information related more to career changes and full-time educational options. The services adjust to these changes as they occur and do their best to provide sought after information and guidance.

In 2018, in particular, some AEGS noted an increase in demand from clients to find out more about new training initiatives, such as apprenticeships and traineeships. This placed great demands on IO's

to ensure that the information was available, updated and accessible. They invested considerable time and effort to maintain quality in the information they disseminated.

Some services have also described how client feedback is used to tweak existing guidance provision and programmes:

Clients participating in personal development programmes organised by the [AEGS] Service provided valuable and informative feedback in relation to programme content, facilitation, duration, venue etc. The feedback resulted in programme content changes, changes to start and finish times etc. It has also resulted in the [AEGS] Service offering advanced and top up personal development programmes, in line with available resources (2016)

Finally, one service developed information material about the AEGS, based on client feedback and client observation:

...we developed a client charter. This charter was developed in response to client behaviour and as a way of rationalising our approach when explaining the service and process to the client. It sets out how we can support clients, what can be expected of us and what is expected of the client when engaging with the Guidance Service. This is now being used to contract with the client. (2014)

Advocating

Another recurring theme is that the client feedback has allowed practitioners to advocate on behalf of clients, in relation to both FET courses on offer and AEGS resources. For example, informed by client work, some services have utilised that experience to better inform and collaborate with providers, facilitating the development of appropriately 'adapted' course provision. Such advocacy can be useful to the client, the course provider and can address local labour market needs. Other services have informed ETB management of prevalent barriers for AEGS clients in accessing courses:

...many clients who have younger children find Childcare a barrier to doing a full-time option. This has been fed back to Programme Coordinators and AEO and many QQI Certified courses are now to be run under the Community Education Programme, allowing women/men who have been at home with children to gain access to courses for free and upskill. (2018)

Some services also drew on client feedback to lobby for specific AEGS resources:

A number of clients have expressed a need for, and disappointment in, the lack of a drop-in information service that allows people to use PCs, printing and photocopying facilities free of charge for educational research and job searching etc. This feedback has been reiterated at numerous management meetings and we will continue to advocate for the reinstatement of this service, in an appropriate, welcoming space. (2016)

An example of advocacy related to AEGS resources was based on an identified client need for more frequent outreach provision in the community. One AEGS lobbied for a suitable additional premises in a specific town where clients had expressed a need for more locally provided guidance service. The AEGS staff informed and discussed this need with their local management for five years, after which "a premise had been secured which would house the Adult Guidance Service". (2018)

Client Interaction & Communication

Some feedback has informed how services interact and communicate with clients and the public. For example, many AEGS have increased their presence on social media and some have visited groups more regularly based on client feedback.

Client feedback has also informed how they can most efficiently gather client feedback. One service established a routine of making follow-up phone calls to clients after six months:

Follow up calls with all clients after 6 months of leaving the service continue. The reason for the follow up is two fold and was based on requests and feedback from clients and also on our own reporting needs. Firstly it is to ensure that clients are well supported in their pathway and are aware they can revisit the service and continue to receive guidance and information. Secondly it aids us in completing progressions reports on the database. (2018)

One service expanded on the feedback sheet they provided to clients after a one-to-one guidance session with the aim to be better informed in advance of a follow-up appointment:

...a qualitative section on our one-to-one client form to note verbal feedback on how the guidance process was being experienced by the client. This feedback is useful for the practitioner in working with the client. (2014)

One service described a different way of seeking out client feedback which primarily involved social media:

Our Facebook Page is one of our growing methods of communication with our learners, staff and others. We did a review of our Facebook Page in February 2016 and we are using that indirect feedback/and analysis of Fans, Engagement, Popular posts, trends etc. over the previous 6 months to shape a plan for the future use of our Facebook. (2016)

The service also outlined how the review informed their priorities and practices in terms of how they use social media and what content they focus on.

Client feedback has also highlighted that people dropping into the services prefer to meet an IO face-to-face rather than accessing information online. Based on that feedback, some services ensure that the office is always staffed (2018).

Barriers to acting on client feedback

In addition to the challenges of collecting client feedback, a number of AEGS have also experienced some frustration as they do not always have the opportunity to implement client feedback into their practice. The main barrier stated relate to staffing shortages. For example, one service stated that client demands were not met due to the service operating with just one Adult Education Guidance Coordinator and no other AEGS staff.

The consequences of attempting to offer services beyond their resources were noted by another service where long waiting lists for one-to-one guidance meetings were the result of increased guidance provision to asylum seekers who had more complex and time-consuming support needs.

AEGS Activities

This section reports the key findings in relation to a number of activities, most of which is drawn from data in the Qualitative Returns. Please note that due to the changes to the Qualitative Returns section of the AGMS (see Appendix B), most of the findings draw on data from a limited number of years. The following activities are reported on here:

- Outreach provision
- Networking
- Social Inclusion
- Gender Equality
- Developing Resources and using ICT
- Marketing
- Continuing Professional Development needs
- Priority Planning

Outreach provision

A specific question about the outreach provision of the AEGS was included in the qualitative returns section of the AGMS during the years 2004 to 2010.

AEGS have given examples of how and where they have provided outreach services, generally by listing locations and frequency of outreach provision, which often seems to be weekly. Some also describe local or regional fairs, events and once-off site visits and information sessions. However, the responses cannot be easily quantified as they vary in how much information they provide. Nonetheless, in reviewing the responses, some key features emerge and the most prominent examples of services/agencies where outreach is being provided include:

- Rural FET centres
- Literacy services and ITABE courses
- VTOS centres
- Community education groups
- Local Training Initiatives
- BTEI centres
- Young Mothers groups
- Women's refuge centres
- CE schemes / Supervisors
- DFSA (now DEASP)
- Jobs Clubs
- Active retirement groups
- FÁS / Intreo / DEASP
- Family Resource Centres
- Local Employment Services
- Local Traveller Groups
- Rural Gaeltacht villages

- Agencies catering for clients with special needs, e.g. Enable Ireland and Rehab-Care
- Primary Healthcare Projects
- Youthreach
- Libraries

As part of the expectation of the AEGS and the engagement with Adult Community and Literacy Education, AEGS established outreach provision with the objective to forge a connection with the most ‘hard to reach’ target groups. It was envisioned that the outreach provision, including information sessions in various groups, helped to increase the awareness of the AEGS and thereby lead to increased uptake of guidance provision.

Some services describe a challenging process of securing suitable AEGS outreach spaces. The suitability of a premises was judged in terms of being able to ensure confidentiality and privacy for one-to-one clients. Detailed examples of how services negotiated with local agencies and services about securing a suitable premise for outreach guidance activities are also provided in the AGMS. Some services were availing of a ‘free’ space in libraries in order to save expenses, but with some serious concerns about the lack of privacy. There are also examples of AEGS who had to significantly reduce the amount of outreach activities due to limited funding/staffing.

Networking

A specific question about networking activities was included in the qualitative returns section of the AGMS during the years 2004 to 2010. It was later included in the AEGI Operational Guidelines (DES 2012). As the services were not asked to quantify their networking activities, it is not possible to assess the number of hours or activities in any given time period. Nonetheless, the data provides ample evidence that networking is an essential part of the AEGS, that it is continuous throughout the year and that it includes both regular meetings and events.

As one service eloquently described it; networking activities are undertaken with the objectives to “*foster communication, synergy and linkages with relevant agencies in order to ensure [that] a fully co-ordinated and integrated service is available to our clients*”. (2008)

There appears to be a general consensus about the importance of networking. However, some services have reported that they have had to limit their networking activities due to underfunding and/or understaffing. For example, one service stated the following:

We still have to severely limit our networking as we do not have an Information Officer to attend many of the available networking type meetings. We continue to maintain some key networking. (2006)

More recent case studies suggest that the lack of staff continued to be a significant issue in some services.

The data suggest that networking activities are undertaken at three levels. Firstly, most services attend regular ‘team meetings’ within their local VEC/ETB. Such meetings tend to include the AEGS staff, Community Education Facilitator (CEF), Adult Literacy Organisers (ALO’s), and the Adult Education

Officers (AEOs). Additionally, 'Local Advisory Groups' as well as national advisory groups have provided networking structures for AEGS on both local and national levels.

Secondly, some services have taken the lead in developing and establishing specific professional networks or interagency groups, such as 'Education Awareness Networks' and 'Interagency Networks'. A wide range of services and agencies are often represented in these types of networks, such as:

- FÁS / DEASP / Intreo
- Supported Employment Networks
- Health services / HSE
- Local Employment Services (LES) mediators
- Social workers, rehabilitation services etc.
- Local partnerships
- NGOs
- Education providers at post-primary, FET and HE levels

Thirdly, more sporadic networking activities occur throughout the year, and can involve anything from an education fair, to meetings and phone calls between two or more services.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion has been a key priority for the AEGS since its establishment and it is also a stated policy goal in the FET sector more broadly as SOLAS aims to expand "FET access for socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged groups" (SOLAS 2016, p.5).

In the qualitative returns, services were prompted to *give details of the activities of your service which address the theme of Social Inclusion*, during the years 2008-2010. However, there is evidence of activities focusing on social inclusion throughout the qualitative data in the AGMS.

Several AEGS emphasised that social inclusion permeates *all* their work as a majority of their one-to-one and group guidance clients are marginalised to some degree. One service stated that they always strive to be aware of issues relating to social inclusion and work towards it.

Other services explained:

The key point is that as a service providing guidance to the educationally disadvantaged, all our work can be shown to be addressing the theme of social inclusion.

And:

Everything we do at a service level for existing and potential [clients] and at the strategic/visioning level in terms of partnership working, collaboration and planning /.../ is about addressing the theme of Social Inclusion and about raising awareness of how guidance and education can support adults to become self-enabling.

Many practical examples are provided of activities aimed at groups which are considered particularly marginalised, such as refugees and asylum seekers, members of the Traveller Community, and adults with disabilities. As social inclusion was only included as a specific requirement for three years, no trend can be discerned for this short time period. Nonetheless, the data has been analysed and categorised as follows:

- **Outreach** – visiting community education programmes in particular, to introduce and talk about the AEGS, to ensure better understanding of the impartial free available services, and to introduce progression possibilities for programme participants, tutors and outreach centre staff. Also visiting health care settings and Community Employment (CE) scheme participants to provide information about both the AEGS and local educational opportunities.
- **Upskilling AEGS staff** – Many staff members engaged in training/CPD with the objective to making the service and their information more accessible to marginalised adults. For example, Adult Guidance Information Officers in several services attended NALA ‘Plain English’ training to ensure that materials produced were accessible to participants in the Adult Basic Education Service. Some services have also had information leaflets translated to several languages to increase accessibility. All AEGS staff have also completed NCGE / NALA Literacy Awareness training (prior to 2014).
- **Networking and Referring** – AEGS services are able to both receive and make appropriate referrals by establishing networks and good working relationships with local services which cater for marginalised groups and issues such as immigration, homelessness and addiction for example.

Some AEGS also make reference to social inclusion policy, in terms of being involved in developing the Social Inclusion Strategy with the local County Development Board.

Gender Equality

In the qualitative returns for 2008-2010, services were prompted to *give details of the activities of your service which address the theme of Gender Equality*. Gender equality-focused work has historically concentrated on addressing inequality experienced by women. Furthermore, the inclusion of this section of the quality returns was influenced by the ‘National Women’s Strategy: 2007-2016’ (Department for Justice and Equality 2007), in which one key objective was to ‘increase the participation of women in the labour force’. Indeed, a number of responses in the AGMS make reference to the strategy, and related projects. For example:

At present the Guidance Service is providing guidance on an ongoing basis to /.../ The Women’s programme supported by BTEI/FAS/ [Name of Local group] – this group comes under the Equality for Women Measure (2008)

Another service stated that they:

...participated in an Equality Impact Assessment process as part of the strategic planning process of the adult education service where a key focus was on gender equality. The outcome for us was that isolated rural men are the hardest to reach... (2008)

A third AEGS highlighted that they were involved in an equality project aimed at encouraging and promoting entrepreneurship among women.

However, in the AEGS and in FET, *men* have been underrepresented for some time. As a result, a considerable proportion of the activities outlined under this section were aimed at encouraging men to engage in education and guidance counselling. Another important contextual factor is the high unemployment rate amongst men during the years 2008-2010 due to the economic recession and crash of the construction industry. One AEGS described the following situation:

There has been an increase in the number of Males accessing the Service this quarter. The majority have come from the Construction Industry with no Leaving Certificate qualifications or formal qualifications resulting in the necessity to broker on their behalf with Adult and Further Education Providers to accommodate their educational needs. (2009)

It is also worth noting that the proportion of male AEGS clients rose from 31.5% in 2007 to 45.8% in 2010 (see Chart 24 under Client Demographics/Gender).

The most prominent responses relate to outreach activities and ongoing involvement with various men's and women's groups, often through Literacy and Community Education programmes. However, many services responded something to the effects of: *"our service is available to both men and women and seeks to help empower people to realise their potential"* (2010).

Developing Resources and using ICT

Between 2004 and 2007, the qualitative returns included a section on progress made in developing an accessible local database of education and training opportunities and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In the qualitative returns for 2008 to 2010, the services were simply prompted to give details of the use of ICT.

Although not all responses specified which staff member engaged in the different activities, developing resources appear to be activities primarily of the Adult Guidance Information Officers. This was particularly noticeable in services that stated that the absence of an Information Officer had limited their ability to develop such resources. AEG Co-ordinators and Guidance Counsellors referred more to *using* ICT resources in one-to-one guidance sessions as opposed to developing databases and resources.

There was also some variation between services, particularly in the earlier years (i.e. 2004-2007). Whilst most services had made a move towards digitalising information and using ICT for a majority of their communication, some services stated that there was not a great demand from clients for online resources. However, by 2008-2010, all services appeared to be using ICT in a wide range of ways and some refer to it as *"integral to the delivery of an efficient guidance service"*.

The recurring types of resources and uses of ICT in the services include:

- Use of the Guidance website to deliver standard information on study and career options
- Enquiries facility on the VEC/ETB/AEGS website
- Psychometric testing and interest inventories software packages, such as Pathfinder

- Online career development tools/programmes, such as Qualifax and CareersPortal
- Helping clients with online applications, e.g. CAO
- E-mail address book for education providers, used to notify them of upcoming events and other relevant information.
- A database of education related services for dissemination of information on events etc.
- Text messaging to remind clients of upcoming appointments and courses of interest
- Computer class for VTOS and BTEI groups focused on online research into career and educational opportunities
- Use of, and contribution to NCGE website and handbook
- Resource room/facilities – where adults can use computers to search for information or apply for courses and employment
- Assistive Technology, e.g. ‘Zoomtext’ and ‘Browse Aloud’
- Signage, durable magazine boxes and leaflet holders for the library
- eNewsletter
- Factsheets and FAQ
- Continuously updated information resource library, accessible to clients and staff

Noticeably, the use of the online AGMS Client Database was perhaps taken for granted as it was only mentioned by a small number.

Some services also reported their involvement in an EU funded project focused on developing a website where clients could explore different facets of career exploration and engage in online discussions.

As ICT use was not addressed post 2010 qualitative reports, there were no mentions of social media usage. However, social media was mentioned in other sections of the AGMS in more recent years. For example, references to developing resources and ICT are made under the headings *Best practice*, *CPD* and *Client feedback* in this report.

Marketing

Marketing, as an activity of the AEGS, was included in the quarterly qualitative returns forms between 2004 and 2007. It had a relatively low response rate, as less than half of the services responded to this particular section each reporting period.

The marketing activities mentioned in the qualitative returns foremost include:

- Brochures, distributed to different programmes, local agencies and at events
- Information about the service on the VEC/ ETB website
- Articles and advertisements in local radio and newspapers

Additionally, several services stated ‘word of mouth’ was the most effective form of marketing of the service, and some stated that due to staffing shortages, they did not engage in marketing activities as they would not have the capacity to support a larger number of clients.

Various forms of marketing and promotional activities were also mentioned in relation to 'best practice', where support from the NCGE in relation to producing material was mentioned amongst other things.

Some challenges were also put forward by the research advisory group in the context of the FET reform and amalgamation of services. Some of the outcomes of these changes involved AEGS needing to 're-brand' and produce marketing material under new service names. Some AEGS were also relocated to large multiplex buildings sharing facilities with other FET programmes and some reported that local management may have placed greater emphasis on student recruitment rather than impartial guidance counselling provision.

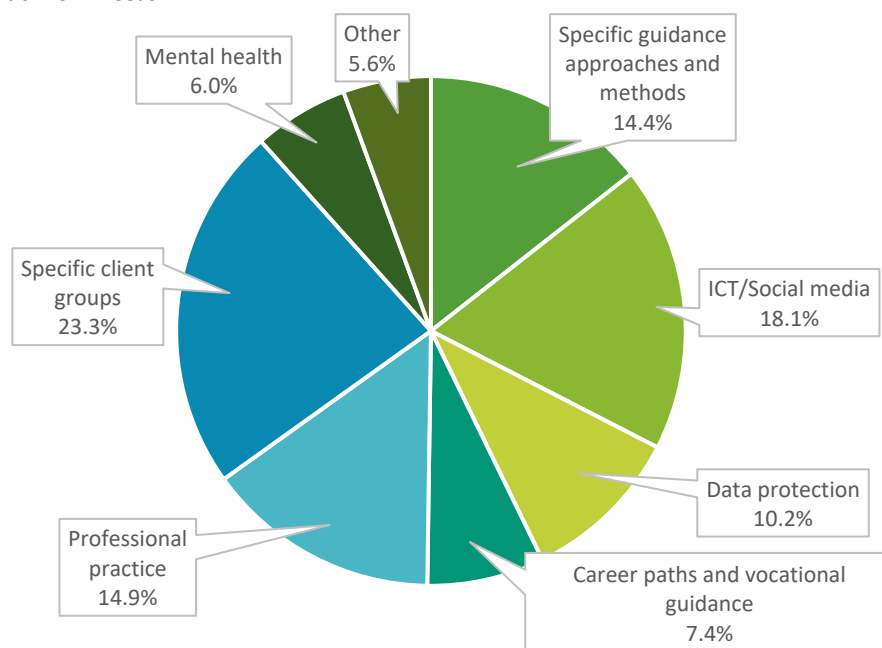
Continuing Professional Development needs

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for staff involved in the provision of adult guidance and in FET fosters both quality professional practice and better learner outcomes (DES 2012; 2016; SOLAS 2014). The CPD needs, in terms of skills development that are essential to the delivery of a quality guidance service, have been recorded in the Qualitative Returns during the years 2012-2018 and inform the NCGE in organising CPD on a regular basis. However, the impact of delivered CPD has not been identified in the qualitative returns.

Some services distinguished the CPD needs by AEGS role, and as a broad generalisation, social media and ICT training was primarily sought by AEG IOs, while Guidance Counsellors were interested in learning more about specific guidance methods and approaches, and Coordinators sought training on staff management and general project management skills. However, most identified CPD needs are stated more generally for the provision of the guidance service and did not make a distinction based on professional roles.

All CPD topics identified in the qualitative returns 2012-2018 have been categorised and are presented in Chart 61.

Chart 61. CPD needs



The CPD category most frequently mentioned relate to developing a better understanding for working with specific client groups (23.3%). Some of the prevalent examples include people with disabilities (particularly Dyslexia, Autism and Learning Disabilities), adolescents, and asylum seekers.

The figures in Chart 61. include responses for all relevant years (2012-2018), but it is interesting to note that different topics emerged as dominant in different years. This appears to primarily be in response to policy developments. One of the most notable examples concerned delivering guidance to adolescents, which was a recurring topic in 2012 and 2013, at which time the remit of the AEGS was broadened to include clients from the age of 16 (pre 2012 the minimum age was 18). Similarly, as the European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) came into effect in 2018, data protection training emerged as a popular CPD request that year (18.8% of all CPD topics that year related to data protection, compared to an overall proportion of 10.2%).

Priority Planning

In terms of identified key priority areas for AEGS, one recurring theme relates to staffing and the challenges of working in an ‘understaffed’ service. For example, one AEG Coordinator notes:

Currently this service is significantly under resourced so the primary objective is to fill a Guidance Counsellor position.

Furthermore, in 2013 and 2014, several services highlighted that the development of SOLAS and the amalgamation of VECs into ETBs dominated the AEGS priority planning and to some degree undermined, prevented or limited the AEGS’ priority planning and activities.

Another theme in the data concerns the need to remain up-to-date and well informed with local and national labour market information and also to plan for how best such information can be shared with the target groups and the public. The use of social media and ICT in this regard emerged as a priority for services.

Other recurring themes relate to promoting FET access and progression, as well as promoting the guidance service itself. However, one AEGS highlighted the challenge in promoting an under-staffed service while also maintaining a quality service.

In 2018, there appears to be organisational or structural changes taking place in some ETB's which were significantly affecting the AEGS. For example, AEGS stated that they needed to address "the changing role of the Information Officer" and the relocation of the AEGS which was due to take place but without consultation with the AEGS staff. Another service mention plans for a "new guidance centre".

Furthermore, one AEGS felt the need for "*establishing a rationale for the necessity of an Information Officer for the Service to support best practice and meet the demands of clients*", which suggests that such a rationale was not evident to local management.

Best Practice

The examples of best practice which were submitted in the qualitative returns on a quarterly basis in the AGMS during the years 2004 to 2010 have been subjected to thematic analysis. The following five key themes emerge and examples are provided for each theme:

1. Developing and establishing regular professional practices
2. Collaboration and interagency work
3. Promoting the service and increasing access
4. Developing resources and information material
5. Evaluation and research

Developing and establishing regular professional practices

Many services outlined practices which they had established based on both client feedback and 'trial and error'. The nature of such practices ranged from client centred to administrative and strategic and some key examples are listed here:

Practice type	Examples
<i>Client centred</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Providing the client with a copy of the information recorded after a guidance session. ❖ Regular outreach guidance in partnership with local community education providers.
<i>Administrative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Making use of the (AGMS) text messaging facility to remind clients of appointments, leading to fewer delays or clients being a 'no show'. ❖ Filtering requests for Guidance from clients – i.e. not automatically arranging an appointment for all clients with the Guidance Counsellor as some require information, or assistance with CV preparation which the Information Officer can provide. ❖ Scheduling time to follow up with clients and carry out administration duties, e.g. close offices on mid-day on Fridays to dedicate the afternoon to such duties.
<i>Strategic</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strategy meetings involving all the sections connected with Adult Education locally, to assess the local needs and to plan for the future based on the emerging needs of all clients. ❖ Guidance Counsellor and Information Officer dedicated three days to review and plan which yielded a calendar of events and a strategic plan for the forthcoming year. ❖ Meeting formally on a regular basis within the AEGS to share best practice and to support each other. ❖ Team/Staff Supervision by a trained facilitator and mediator and regular half days of team building exercises.

Collaboration and interagency work

It is evident from the AGMS data that the AEGS do not work in isolation and many services identified their collaborative and interagency work as key examples of best practice. These are examples of collaborative work which yielded tangible outcomes for clients:

- ❖ The local AEGS Advisory Groups were highlighted as an important group by many services. The purpose of these advisory groups were often to evaluate the service and plan how best to support the service in the future. The group provides support and advice for the work of the service, including its outreach activities. Whilst most appeared to have met on a regular and formal basis, some services met more informally, partly due to the recruitment embargo as some key representatives may not have been available.
- ❖ Regular collaboration with local services and agencies was a key feature across all services. For example, local VEC/ETB CEO, AEO, ALOs, Outreach officers, VTOS and BTEI coordinators and CEFs collaborated with the aim to develop new courses and progression routes for adult learners. Other interagency work frequently involved the DEASP/Intreo/FÁS, LES and the HSE and often focused on identifying local needs and developing a programme for long-term unemployed adults.
- ❖ An information sharing process between the guidance counsellors of three different AEGS services in different counties was established - *“The opportunity to do this with colleagues was a tremendous boost to the system”*.
- ❖ A two-week summer school for adults considering returning to education was identified, initiated and co-facilitated by one AEGS. Together with BTEI and Community Education staff, they provided taster courses, study skills, information sessions and a visit to the library.
- ❖ Over a period of time, the staff of one AEGS noted a prevalent interest for clients in the area of training in personal counselling. However, travel, transport and finance were identified as major barriers, so the staff liaised and negotiated with a course provider. The result of the collaboration led to a course in counselling at NFQ level 6 being introduced locally by the VEC for the first time. Many of the clients who pursued this course subsequently expressed an interest in progressing to diploma or degree level. The staff also collaborated with the Adult Education Officer as well as FÁS at that time, who agreed to part-fund the course, thus removing several significant barriers for clients.
- ❖ Another AEGS had an ongoing partnership with local VEC/ETB staff and external agencies where they discussed the training needs of recently unemployed clients/learners and supported each other in identifying appropriate course options.
- ❖ In conjunction with the ALO, VTOS Co-ordinator and an AEGS, a Skills Revision course was run for one week. This course was aimed at adult literacy learners and other returning learners who wished to avail of VTOS courses but lacked the confidence in their ability to re-enter the world of study. Ten learners participated in a pilot course which was a great success and appeared to help reduce the drop-out rate in early months of the VTOS courses. The course provided participants the tools they need to participate fully in their new courses.

Promoting the service and increasing access

A number of services had developed innovative and new ways of promoting the AEGS, and thereby increasing the accessibility of the AEGS to clients. These are a few examples of successful activities in different services:

- ❖ One AEGS received support from the NCGE to **produce a video** about guidance for adults and how to contact the AEGS.
- ❖ The Information Officer of one AEGS designed and printed a **Guidance Calendar** which marketed the service, whilst also functioning as a calendar where the main education events and important dates for adult learners were highlighted. The calendar was sent to partnership agencies and was available for students as well.
- ❖ **'Adult Guidance Information Clinics'** (which were provided for approximately two hours) targeted at VEC/ETB staff and aimed at helping them to better understand what the AEGS does, who is it for, and how to access it. The clinics also provided staff with front line guidance skills and tools, such as handling awkward moments/situations as well as some key guidance related websites. The AEGS also offered staff guidance support post Clinics. The service found it to be an *"extremely effective means of marketing the Service, and enlisting the staff to help refer eligible people for the Service"*. VEC/ETB staff attitudes and understanding of the Service were also improved.
- ❖ Another AEGS placed **advertisements on the back of supermarket receipts** and felt it to be an effective way to promote the service.

Developing Information & Resources

Most services reported on developing some form of information and resources for either clients, VEC/ETB staff, or both. Here are some

- ❖ Arising from identified needs of literacy learners, an Adult Education Guidance Counsellor and a resource worker in the Literacy Service developed a **Resource Pack for Literacy Tutors** addressing learners' Self-Awareness, Self-Confidence, Knowledge of Strengths and Intelligences and Learning to Learn. The work took place over three months and resulted in Guidelines, Information Sheets and Worksheets.
- ❖ Some services developed a **'Resources' section on the local VEC/ETB website** including topics such as Going to College; Funding; News; and Programmes.
- ❖ **Booklets, factsheets and Newsletters** were resources many services developed and updated regularly. Common topics included: Study skills, interviews, C.V.'s, local educational opportunities. Many services distributed such hard copy resources and information in centres such as JobsClubs, CE schemes and Libraries.
- ❖ Some services set up **'Learning support units'** in conjunction with literacy services. Such facilities included information library and resources for Guidance and literacy, study area, student computer and one to one meeting rooms.

Evaluation and practitioner research

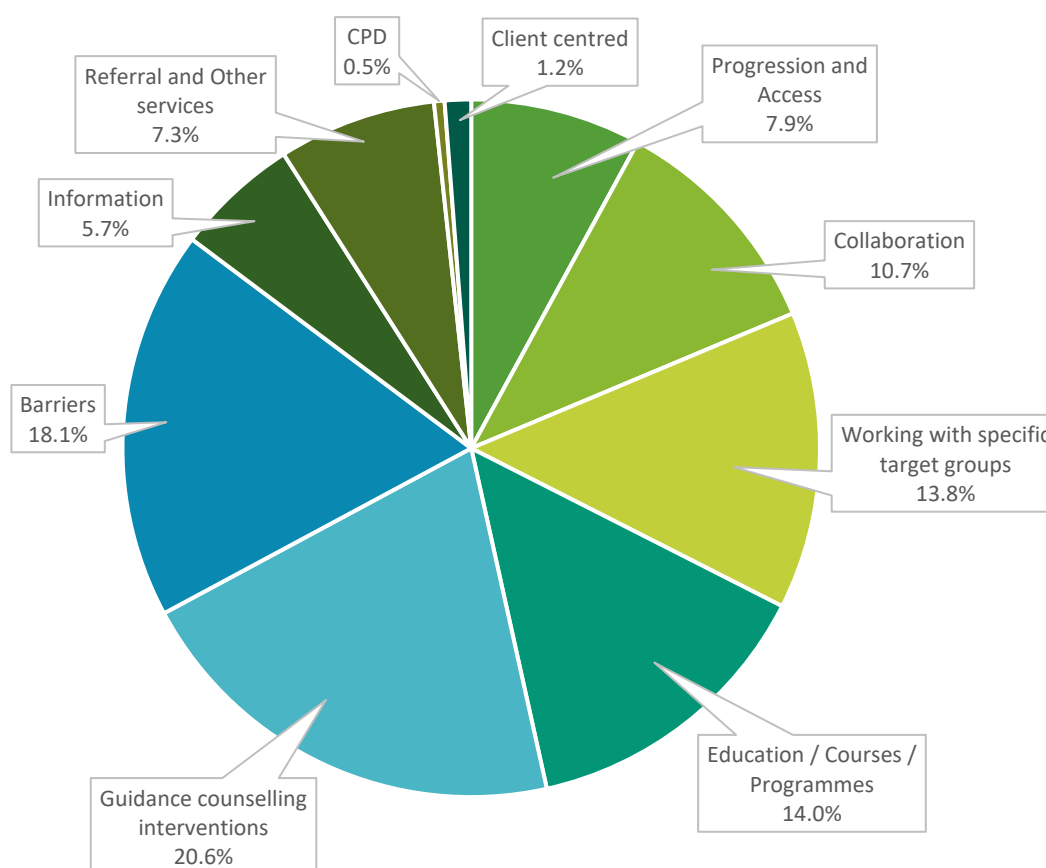
Whilst the client feedback reporting is addressed elsewhere in this document, some services highlighted additional forms of evaluations and data collection methods they had used in their services. For example:

- ❖ One AEGS conducted an **evaluation of the benefits of guidance** for the adult client. The report was used to develop a procedure manual outlining the steps and any other relevant information involved in gathering and collating the relevant information. The report was also shared with the NCGE and all the other AEGS nationally.
- ❖ One AEGS organised a **Focus Group** with representatives from each of the original target groups, i.e. VTOS, Literacy and BTEI learners. They *“used creative groupwork methods as gained from staff participation in the NCGE funded creative facilitation group with Partners”*. The findings provided them with insights into the adults’ experiences of returning to education, their guidance and information needs and their experience of, and recommendations to the service. In addition, the participants enjoyed meeting adult learners from other projects, sharing experiences and they appreciated being asked for their opinions and recommendations.
- ❖ Several services conducted overall evaluations of their AEGS, and some facilitated evaluations with specific groups, such as VTOS groups for example, with the aim to improve the service and to find possible alternative ways of delivering the service.

Case Studies

Case studies has been a feature in the AGMS since 2013 and there has been a total of n286 case studies recorded in the AGMS over six years (2013 to 2018). The first step in analysing the case study data involved a quantitative analysis of the keyword frequency in order to gain some insight into topics addressed. The keywords were subject to content analysis whereby they were categorised and the proportion of keywords within each category is presented in Chart 62.

Chart 62. Keyword categories 2013-2018



A more in-depth and qualitative thematic analysis of the content of the case studies was then completed, and the case study themes identified in the AGMS reports by the NCGE (available for the years 2014-2018) were also considered. This yielded contextualised and substantial insights into the work in the AEGS nationally. Many case studies are detailed and to ensure anonymity of both clients and services, the ten case studies presented in this report have been anonymised by removing any identifiers.

It is challenging to distil the vast amount of rich data in a meaningful yet accessible way. Nonetheless, five themes have been discerned, including:

1. Social inclusion
2. Collaboration
3. Supporting Client Progression and Learner Pathways
4. Employer engagement
5. Resources and ICT

In addition to the five themes identified, the collection of case studies is underpinned by a number of core values and quality practices which are encompassed in the holistic model of the AEGS. That model includes impartial and person-centred support, collaborative practice with key stakeholders, as well as adaptability and flexibility as services have demonstrated an ability to be proactive as well as responsive to economic, societal and policy changes. The value of the guidance and information ‘team’, including Adult Educational Guidance Coordinators, Adult Education Guidance Counsellors and Guidance Information Officers is also evident. However, some case studies have brought practice challenges to the fore and prior to presenting each theme, some patterns in the data in relation to challenges and outcomes are noted:

Challenges

The most prevalent identified challenges referred to across the case studies relate to:

- **Staffing shortages** - For example, as a consequence of improved collaboration and referral protocols between the DEASP and the local AEGS, one service noted the challenge of “*12 to 14 [DEASP] Case Officers referring into 3 Guidance Counsellors*”. A lack of time to engage in projects on a continual basis.
- **Barriers** – clients’ personal issues such as lack of self-confidence, limited language skills, addiction etc.
- **Access to appropriate external support services** - for clients with significant support needs, such as mental health problems for example.
- **Unsuitable premises** – For example, dealing with being relocated to a less accessible premises during the restructuring of the local FET sector.

Outcomes

Although most stated outcomes identified in the case studies are specific to the particular clients or projects concerned, many of the outcomes can be categorised as follows:

- **Increased self-confidence** – when clients develop and strengthen their self-confidence, there also seems to be other positive ‘spill-over’ effects in terms of educational progression
- **Increased access and engagement** – individuals considered ‘hard to reach’ and socially disadvantaged gained increased access to education and employment opportunities
- **Development of new courses** – where AEGS advocated within the VEC / ETB / local provider on client needs and gaps in provision, courses which were well aligned with identified learner needs were developed in collaboration with FET providers
- **Strengthened relationships** - between the AEGS and other services, agencies, employers and clients

The five themes are presented below and two case studies have been selected to demonstrate each theme.

Theme 1. Social inclusion

Numerous case studies focus on specific efforts to support individuals or groups who face significant barriers to accessing education and employment, such as asylum seekers, early school leavers, long-term unemployed, and individuals with disabilities. These are under-represented groups which are being targeted through a range of government policy, such as Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025; Action Plan for Education 2016-2019, Pathways to Work 2016-2020, FET Strategy 2014-2019 and the Action Plan to Expand Apprenticeship and Traineeship in Ireland 2016-2020.

Some cases demonstrate innovative and sometimes novel ideas aiming to remove barriers and increasing accessibility, which could range from evening opening hours to comprehensive projects with a multiagency approach. The outcomes of some of the cases was a greater range of courses being made available and a more flexible delivery to facilitate those with significant barriers.

Case Study 1 focus on group guidance and literacy and the positive outcomes in terms of working towards the FET strategic goal of active inclusion (SOLAS 2014), whereas Case Study 2 involves advocacy work on behalf of asylum seekers which resulted in policy change and their legal right to access education.

CASE STUDY 1

Title: Literacy and Anxiety supports

Year: 2015

The Scenario:

Integration of literacy in Group Guidance work: Following CPD on incorporating Literacy into every subject in FET

Share What Happened:

1. Incorporated aspects of CPD into ongoing work with group including Integration of Literacy.
2. Particular student became more self-directed that particular day without need for ongoing re-assurance
3. Observation was that everyone in the group benefited: risk of oversimplification but pitched level to incorporate potential literacy issues.
4. Had introduced stress management techniques in 'settling in' phase of the group under segment on 'Managing Change/transition'. The latter may have further supported the perceived change.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

1. More preparation time involved before meeting the group, but was able to apply some suggestions from CPD when actually working with students (small refinements)
2. Usually incorporate short stress management technique in the group work towards the beginning or if I notice group is becoming anxious. They have other subjects before guidance and short techniques employed help close off work on previous subject. Thus settling into guidance work is possible. Need to consciously remember to use time for transition: might forget if we are asked to re-locate to another room.
3. Process is ongoing. Fine tuning of balance between oversimplification and aiming at general group level in order to minimise stress and maximise learning may not always be 'right'. Easier to manage if meeting a particular group weekly over a longer period of time, i.e. relationship with group has a chance to develop.

Strengths and Potential:

- Benefits every learner in the group (more focus on literacy resulted in more students using subject specific language)
- Reduces anxiety
Extends vocabulary
- CPD was available to us and integration of new knowledge helped this group and will help other groups and individuals
- Support of individual supervision was also essential to advancing learning in the group by giving time to consider how to help student manage their fears which at times blocked ability to learn
- More space for learning in the group as there was greater calm and less interruptions in the group
- Pacing of guidance input improved: more experienced learners were not having to wait to move ahead. This may have been attributable in part to getting to know individual learners' pacing better over a period of time.

Key Outcomes:

- Learners vocabulary grew
- Learners used formal language of the subject area more
- Anxiety levels fell with growing trust in their own knowledge: Reflected how students had worked out the answers to help build self-esteem and trust in own ability.
- Easier to work with the group as less clarification and re-assurance required
- The CPD helped to meet FET Strategic goal of Active Inclusion of people of all abilities in this group.

CASE STUDY 2

Title: Lobbying on behalf of Asylum Seekers**Year:** 2017**Scenario:**

One of our roles in the AEGS is to lobby for the right to education/training for all of humanity. In [name of county] we have a direct provision centre for Asylum Seekers and hence many have availed of our service for several years. Over the years asylum seekers spoke of the frustration and lack of wellbeing as a result of not having the right to education/training. I have reassured them that I would continue to lobby on their behalf. I have sent letters and emails to a number of Ministers in the past. At the request of our FET Director I was asked to write about the Asylum Seekers experiences. As a response I thought it more appropriate to invite 5 Asylum Seekers to write their experience and asked permission to have their letter included in my email.

Share What Happened:

I continued to write emails to the different Ministers seeking permission for Asylum Seekers to have the right to education /training.

I invited 5 Asylum Seeker to a workshop asking them to write of their experience about not having the right to education/training and the effects. I asked permission to send their letters to the Department. We had three workshops, the first was to discuss their experience to date, the second was to write their experience and the third was to share their stories in the group and the consequences of giving permission to have their letters included with my email.

Identify any Challenges:

Some of the Asylum Seekers were not confident in sharing their stories and experiences in case it would affect their right to stay in Ireland. After discussion and clarity took place and the necessity to write only what they were comfortable with, 3 of them agreed to share with the Department.

Describe Strengths and Potential:

- This highlighted to our clients that we were supporting them and that when lobbying as a group it can be more effective.
- It enhanced the clients' confidence and their trust in the system

Key Outcomes:

The Government decision to opt-in to the EU (recast) Receptions Conditions Directive (2013/22/EU).

Theme 2. Collaboration

Collaborative work penetrates most case studies in the AGMS with focus on building stronger links between guidance, education and the wider community, as per Government and DES policy goals (e.g. Action Plan for Education 2016-2019). Some of the key objectives and outcomes of collaborations and interagency work for the AEGS include information sharing, improved referral practices, as well as marketing and increased awareness of the AEGI. These practices also have positive knock-on effects for all involved and ultimately for individuals who benefit from services working together to deliver quality FET provision.

The two case studies below illustrate some of the benefits of interagency work, but they also provide insights into the reality of challenges in collaborating with agencies which may have conflicting objectives.

CASE STUDY 3

Title: Education and Training Network **Year:** 2014

The Scenario:

The Guidance service initiated a local Education and Training network. The network consists of statutory, community and private education and training providers operating in the county and meets on a quarterly basis. The network identifies particular issues in the county regarding the education and training requirements of unemployed and marginalised individuals and groups, early school leavers and those at risk of leaving school early. It works collaboratively to address these issues.

Share What Happened:

The network consists of representatives from ETB (Former VEC and FÁS training), DSP (Now DEASP), Local partnerships, LES, NLN, local LTI's providers, YouthReach, local enterprise centres and private providers. It has worked very well as an information sharing exercise and has somewhat improved referrals between services. Many of the issues that clients of the different services are facing are very similar. In a rural areas, the cost of attending education and training is a significant block to learners and to providers. There is a need for pre-development work to be done with many of the clients that services are meeting. This was being done by community development projects, however due to cutbacks and a change of policy by POBAL much of this work is not happening.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

The network has been a great opportunity to identify issues facing clients in the county, however working collaboratively to address these issues has been difficult. Many of the issues need to be addressed at a policy and government level. Also, many of the members of the network have conflicting priorities and focus the result of which means that collaboration doesn't or can't happen. Also, the members of the network are extremely busy and have little time to give to working together.

Strengths and Potential:

As a network we have been able to advocate on behalf of our clients to the management of the respective services. We also have met with local public representatives to communicate the issues we have identified and how these are impacting on clients.

Key Outcomes:

Local agencies have an opportunity to come together to share information, recent developments and plans for the future. This has facilitated improved planning for education and training provision. It has allowed the guidance service to develop better relationships with the staff of the different agencies, and we are more informed of what is being planned.

CASE STUDY 4

Title: Collaborative Work with Further Education Services and DSP (now DEASP) resulting in appropriate Progression of Clients
Year: 2016

The Scenario:

In 2015 in response to the amount of referrals from DSP to Further Education Courses and the need to ensure that they were placed on appropriate programmes, [the local] ETB established a one week programme focussing on Career interests, skills and talents. The programme is called New Start and is run on a monthly basis subject to DSP Referrals. The Adult Guidance Service had a key role in developing the programme with the Adult Education Officer to ensure that resources were used effectively for the progression of referrals onto appropriate education programmes. Participants explore education and employment options and are advised regarding their educational progression on the National Framework of Qualifications and suitable education programmes in the ETB and elsewhere. The Adult Guidance Service provides support to this programme.

Share What Happened:

Prior to the programme the facilitator linked with the Adult Guidance Service re sharing experiences of this target group, identifying the expectations from this programme and establishing how the Adult Guidance Service could work collaboratively with Further Education for the progression of DSP referrals.

We identified key themes to be covered for example motivation, goal setting, skills development, transferable skills, career options, barriers to employment and job seeking skills.

The approach to the programme is flexible and depends on the group referred. The facilitator also includes a written component which helps when assessing Literacy Levels.

The Adult Guidance Service links closely with the facilitator throughout the programme and is involved in the assessment process.

Midway throughout the programme we deliver a group guidance session outlining suitable progression options available. Participants are advised regarding their educational progression

levels on the NFQ and suitable education programmes. Participants are also met for one-to-one guidance.

Students who require extra support are referred to the Adult Guidance Service.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

This cohort present with a number of challenging issues such as engagement, self-esteem confidence and educational issues.

Setting the scene for the programme and clarifying the ETB's role as an educational provider separate to DSP was important at the beginning of the programme.

Meeting the needs of particular participants who were seeking practical courses.

Depending on the time that participants started the programme there was a wait time for programmes which may have impacted momentum.

Strengths and Potential:

- The location was ideal as all ETB Services were available under the one roof so therefore it was participant-friendly which was reflected in the evaluation forms
- Effective use of resources to identify and place students in a time efficient manner on programmes. We had groups of approximately 15 to 20 students per week.
- Students choose appropriate programmes suitable to their interests and started at the correct level on the National Framework of qualifications.
- Collaborative work with the Adult Literacy service ensured identification of supports to students
- Based on the requirements of participants regarding courses we collated and reported back to Adult Education gaps in course provision

Key Outcomes:

- This programme ensured that students were placed on the correct level on the NFQ thereby choosing appropriate starting points in Education or Employment
- A significant number of the participants progressed and achieved a full award at levels 3, 4 and 5 with some progressing to third level in 2016

Theme 3. Supporting Client Progression and Learner Pathways

Supported progression and learner pathways was an identified theme in the case study data, and in addition to increasing accessing FET, it also relates to supporting learners' retention and completion of programmes, as well as transitions into Higher Education and employment.

As the remit of the AEGS is to provide pre-entry, on-going and pre-exit guidance (DES 2012), the AEGS are ideally positioned to support clearer learner pathways and learning progression which is a key focus across ETBs (SOLAS 2018).

Case Study 5 demonstrates how an AEGS together with the DSP (now DEASP) and BTEI developed a pre-entry programme for unemployed, and Case Study 6 follows an individual who was supported from the point of being made redundant, through FET and into employment.

CASE STUDY 5

Title: First Steps - a holistic pre-entry programme for Adult Education

Year: 2013

The Scenario:

We had identified a need - and alerted the BTEI programme Manager of this need - for learners on programme to be better prepared for the learning experience, thus improving the experience for learners, helping with attendance and drop-out issues and meaningful progression. We felt they would benefit from having a better sense of what they wanted to do, to be better informed before making a decision and to have had experience of being in a learning environment.

Share What Happened:

To this end, some staff from the AEGS and BTEI worked together to plan and develop a pre-entry programme called First Steps. This programme, of 6 hours per week (2 x 3 hours) covers both the personal development side, including learning about Interests, Skills, Values, Decision-Making, Goal-Setting; the information aspect including learning about the education system and the various opportunities; and the learning experience - learners are introduced to Communications and IT getting a flavour for these subjects as well as what being an adult learner involves.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

We linked with DSP to identify unemployed people who would be suitable for the programme. Some, coming through this pathway, were not motivated and some dropped out. Attendance was erratic on the most recent programme, affecting the group dynamic.

Strengths and Potential:

From feedback received, the participants really welcomed having the space and time - without any pre-determined outcome - to reflect on themselves, to build their confidence in themselves, and to decide on a pathway. Many had never realised what opportunities were there - and at that some were interesting ones. There is huge potential in this programme and we feel it should be expanded - rolled out more frequently than the current twice a year, and could even include further elements e.g. participants getting to experience sitting in other classes.

Key Outcomes:

60% went on to further education or training. Most noted a significant increase in confidence and also benefited from the social interaction with the group. It is difficult to note the success in supporting attendance and progression, but this is something we can keep an eye to.

CASE STUDY 6

Title: From redundancy to employment through education and guidance

Year: 2017

Scenario:

A message came through that a bank in the local town was closing within a few months and that staff were being offered relocation or redundancy. The Guidance Service set up a meeting with management and staff, initially as a group and later through one-to-one guidance interviews on the Bank premises. As a result of this some staff immediately started BTEI modules in an effort to make

OVERARCHING RESEARCH ON DATA GATHERED IN DES/SOLAS/NCGE ADULT GUIDANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF THE ADULT EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE INITIATIVE 2004-2018, Published December 2020

them more employable. Ongoing guidance support was offered to staff up to the closure date some months later and on an ongoing basis.

Share What Happened:

A woman, 38 yrs old, was one of the staff members that opted for redundancy. Married with an only son that they had longed for more than 10 years Jean [not her real name] decided not to take relocation as her job had been very stressful and she wanted to spend more time with her son. She wasn't sleeping well and felt that the impending closure of the Bank was adding more to her workload as some management staff had gone out on sick leave. She was worried about her customers, some who were too elderly to learn the skills of internet banking and this affected her concentration and her family life.

Identify any Challenges:

While she had many years' experience of working in a banking environment she had no certificates to add to her CV. She had been doing banking exams but had failed 2 of them which she felt left her in a shaky position for re-employment in this field. Her computing skills were ok, but she had never completed a computing course. She lacked confidence in her ability and admitted that she hadn't been meeting targets recently, partly because [she felt that] management continuously moved the goal posts and were not very accommodating to staff needs.

Describe Strengths and Potential:

She had excellent people skills as well as financial ability. She cared greatly for her customers whom she felt were being let down by the closure, and not supported enough in the interim. Having discussed in detail her interests and the possibilities for increasing her employability she was motivated and excited at the prospect of a job without 'targets to be met'. She immediately started some modules (while still working 4 days a week) and by the time the Branch closed she had accumulated 4 modules at NFQ level 5 in Business Admin. She enjoyed the social aspect of returning to learning, made new friends and got her confidence back. She made plans to complete the Banking exams she needed to complete her award.

Key Outcomes:

Jean was successful in being offered a job in a large Credit Union in another town, 4 days a week. She has plans of finishing her level 5 and get a full award. Her confidence and self-esteem have been raised by the fact that she has achieved distinctions in her modules and knowing that she is more employable than ever. During her work experience module she completed her CV and with the help of the guidance and information service she had an opportunity to do a simulated interview before her 'real' interview for the Credit Union job. She is delighted with [what she described as] the ethos of the credit union isn't on reaching targets, but on looking after customer needs.

Theme 4. Employer engagement

The theme 'employer engagement' features in the case study data, and is also emphasised in recent education policy, such as the objective in Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 (Goal 4), to '*Enhance our capacity to meet national and regional skills needs*'. Case Study 7, below, is an excellent example of where an employer worked with the AEGS and the ETB to develop a course which helped address a local skills shortage.

In addition, there are several examples of careers events and fairs organised by AEGS, where employers have been invited and met with learners and FET providers, such as Case study 8.

CASE STUDY 7

Title: Collaboration between ETB and [Employer] to deliver training that qualifies learners to work in the Intellectual Disability, Healthcare or Childcare sectors. **Year:** 2015

The Scenario:

[A local employer] provides a wide range of innovative services for children and adults with Intellectual Disabilities and is a key employer in the area. The organisation discovered during recruitment in 2014 that there were insufficient applicants presenting with the required NFQ Level 5 qualifications. In response, a meeting was held between [the employer's] staff and ETB staff, including the guidance counsellor for that area.

Share What Happened:

It was agreed that running the course as an LTI (Local Training Initiative) was the best way forward providing the full NFQ Level 5 Healthcare Support and Early Childhood and Education. In addition, Intellectual Disabilities Studies component and non-accredited modules Epilepsy Awareness and C.P.I, (Crisis Prevention Intervention). This would enhance employment prospects across a wider range of roles. The IO and GC met/spoke regularly with [the employer's] designated staff representative. We assisted her with the organising and promotion of an information morning. Second IO did a group text to all clients from surrounding areas to raise awareness of the programmes and the GC and IO followed up with queries. The IO spoke about the guidance service during the information session and both she and the GC were available for individual queries afterwards. Any participant that was unsuccessful in their application was followed up with by the IO and where appropriate met the GC to look at other options.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

Not all applicants were deemed eligible to participate on the LTI programme – the Guidance Service has worked/is working with them to identify alternative options.

The course is intensive given that 2 major NFQ Awards as well as the other modules mentioned above are covered. Some participants found this challenging, they were linked to the Adult Basic Education Service, available within the same building.

Strengths and Potential:

The regular presence of the IO in the building where the training takes place facilitated regular communication and updates on the programme whilst also helping to raise the profile of the Guidance Service.

Successful collaborative and innovative partnership between the ETB and a local employer to respond to a training shortfall and generate employment opportunities for unemployed adults in their local community. This model of collaboration between the ETB and an employer has huge potential to be replicated in other locations and other sectors and is an example of the tangible benefits of increased engagement by the ETB with employers as recommended in the Further Education and Training Strategy.

[The employer's] designated staff member is extremely positive about this first experience of running an LTI programme, they would recommend it as a model to other local employers. They are currently rolling out a second similar programme with another ETB in one of their locations.

Key Outcomes:

Guidance Service involved from the initial planning stage, very positive experience in having direct engagement with a local employer committed to delivering top quality training and real employment opportunities

The involvement of both IOs and the GC highlights the enhanced range of supports the different roles within the Guidance team can bring to a programme such as this

Very high retention rates, 15 out of 16 participants still on the programme

Participants are gaining valuable experience into the many roles within [employer's organisation] and some participants have chosen to do their work placements in different settings including Childcare.

Excellent progression potential from the course - 3 participants have been offered employment from their work placements, with [the employer] aiming to employ the majority of the participants on completion of the course.

CASE STUDY 8

Title: ETB FET Fair - Employers Panel

Year: 2015

The Scenario:

Following student and staff feedback and the focus of the FET Strategy on labour market activation, [name] ETB FET Marketing Group decided to provide an Employers Panel at the annual Further Education and Training Fair event. The purpose of the panel was to bring together experts from the corporate, SME sector and IBEC and to interview them around questions previously canvassed from students and staff. The purpose was to share up to the minute expertise 'from the horse's mouth' so that students and members of the general public could appreciate what is required by employers in a competitive job market.

Share What Happened:

The Guidance Service coordinated the preparation and delivery on the day. AEGS staff worked comprehensively with each employer to ensure they were prepared for each question and that they were able to keep to the time allocated. This entailed email contact and face to face meetings. The stage was setup in a format similar to the "Late Late Show" with comfortable chairs arranged around a low central table. We engaged the services of a video production company to film the event with two cameras with the view of editing material down for use as a teaching resource afterwards. The event went extremely well. Feedback from participants and staff was extremely positive with an appreciation both for the work involved and the need for further events focussing on employment readiness.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

Considerable time went into planning the event with the need for multiple conversations and meetings to ensure employers were prepared. It is important that the person responsible for this role be given the time necessary to do this. Finding employers that were willing to give their time and were able to talk in a confident and insightful way to our audience was quite a challenge. Again this took a great deal of research and discussion and highlights the need for preparation.

Strengths and Potential:

With the right preparation this is a fantastic learning tool for participants and staff. Students on our courses get an appreciation from tutors and guidance counsellors on the importance of preparation for the job hunt and interview but hearing this message from business leaders who are on the front

line of recruitment provides a critically different and positive emphasis. Tutors were also able to update the skills and knowledge of the job readiness area and build this into course provision. The event also built excellent relationships with these employers, all of which said they would be happy to be involved in further events. The success of the event has brought the way we deliver job search and interview skills as an ETB into focus and prompted discussion as to how we might be more innovative in helping our students to be as prepared as possible for the world of work.

Key Outcomes:

- 400 participants from the FET student body and the general public were able to access up to the minute advice and expertise from key local employers on what they are looking for from job applicants
- Tutors and staff were able to refresh their course delivery based on what is required in the real world of work in [county]
- Excellent relationships were developed with the employers - all of which were extremely impressed with how the event was run and they offered their support into the future
- The event demonstrated the need for dedicated employer liaison within FET
- Edited videos of the panel

Theme 5. Resources and ICT

The ‘resources and ICT’ theme featured to varying degrees across the years and services and the DES (2012) AEGI Operational Guidelines also stressed that *“Innovative approaches to guidance delivery should be considered by AEGS, including telephone provision, and e-guidance”* (p.9). There are several examples of services developing local information databases and factsheets as resources for themselves, clients and FET providers. There are also examples of alternative delivery to traditional face-to-face guidance, as one service offered ‘distance guidance’ over the phone to a client who was unable to travel.

Case Study 9, below, provides insights into how ICT was used both as a means for education and career information to reach the public, as well as leading to a positive and collaborative relationship between two AEGS after their two respective VECs were amalgamated to one ETB as part of the FET reform. The subsequent Case study, 10, outlines the involvement of an AEGS in the development of a web-based career tool, aimed specifically at adults in Ireland. Whilst the service noted significant benefits and positive outcomes, they also address the issue of “striking a balance” and ensuring that the client-practitioner relationship does not get lost in the process of embracing ICT tools.

CASE STUDY 9

Title: Developing a website for [county] Adult Educational Guidance Services **Year:** 2015

The Scenario:

Previous to the formation of [name] ETB, the Adult Ed Guidance Service in [one of the counties] developed a guidance section within the VEC website to provide information/course listings of courses under different areas of interest. When the VEC website closed down, our service had choices to make with regard to the type of web-based presence the guidance service wanted to establish, and where it should be positioned.

As our service covers a large county-wide remit and we work from five different centres, we had come to rely on the website as the main information base for ourselves that we could easily access. We therefore needed a website to work for guidance staff as an information resource for all

education and training opportunities in the county as well as providing career and employment skills resources that we might typically use with clients. It needed to be primarily a user friendly resource for clients, especially when dealing with information queries by telephone and email, and it also needed to serve as an information base for staff, tutors and local agencies with which we work.

Share What Happened:

With the newly formed ETB came an opportunity to work more closely with the guidance services in [the other county and city]. We discussed whether it would be of benefit to clients and ourselves to collaborate and develop a guidance website for the AEGS clients and decided the benefits outweighed any difficulties with this proposal.

We sourced a web-designer and started the process of identifying the key priorities for the website, e.g. needs of our target audience, functionality of the website, the overall feel and design we wanted to achieve etc. It also necessitated reviewing current web-based resources, updating information and identifying information gaps. Having the input of three guidance services was helpful in the process in pooling resources, both staff and information, to develop good quality materials.

Once the website was designed, technical issues resolved and ongoing changes made, the work of inputting content began. Progress meetings throughout the process, where we could share information and learning, were important to maintain momentum and support each other in achieving the final outcome.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

1) Issues with regard to branding, identity and ideas around service delivery: In the branding of the website as '[Counties] Adult Educational Guidance Service' we wanted to build a strong website that supports the work we do across [the] ETB and increases awareness of the service. However, we also wanted clarity that we are three different services and that this would be reflected in the website and through our other promotional materials.

2) There were some concerns that having a website that was targeted at a wide client base over [two counties] might lose the sense of it being relevant and accessible to clients on a local basis. It was important therefore that in the design of the website, users could quickly access information and services relating to their area and circumstances.

3) Developing a website is hugely time consuming. Allocating the time needed for meetings, decision-making with regard to information provided and the functionality of the website, liaising with the web designer to address technical issues and achieve desired outcomes was a major challenge throughout the project.

Strengths and Potential:

1) This collaborative project of three guidance services within our ETB working together on achieving something practical and beneficial for our services showed the potential for working on other projects where pooling resources and expertise can add value to what we are currently doing separately.

2) It focused our attention on how we use IT, social media and web-based resources. Where staff resources are stretched and the geographical area for service provision is extensive, I.T. has the potential to address some of these challenges and connect with clients in other ways than face-to-face contact.

3) Information is constantly changing so relying on paper-based information no longer works well for a service that aims to provide up-to-date accurate information or, in working efficiently, when guidance staff are mobile and working in different settings. Developing a good quality web-based information hub for careers and course information makes sense and it is also something service users have come to expect from an Adult Ed. Guidance and Information Service.

Key Outcomes:

- 1) [The] Adult Educational Guidance Services now have a website that allows service users to easily access information on local education and training opportunities as well as resources relating to employment skills and making career choices.
- 2) The website technology has the facility to introduce multi-media presentations and YouTube clips to make the website more interesting and varied.
- 3) The information generated from the website will inform our service regarding which parts of the website are most visited and, in that way, we will be able to tailor our service to best meet the needs of clients.
- 4) The process of working on this project has re-enforced for us the benefits of working collaboratively with other guidance services where there is mutual benefit and our experience shows this can prove to be both supportive and positive for staff involved.

CASE STUDY 10

Title: Reflections on Learner engagement with MyFuture+.**Year:** 2018**The Scenario:**

Our AEGS volunteered to participate in the pilot phase of the development of the MyFuture+ resource with NCGE and CareersPortal. As part of the pilot the guidance counsellor delivered a MyFuture+ workshop to a Learner Group who were completing a work experience module as part of their QQI 4 Information Technology course. In collaboration with the Centre Resource Worker and the Course Tutor the Adult Guidance Service supported the delivery of the Work Experience module and covered a range of the SLO outcomes through the delivery of a three hour MyFuture+ workshop focusing on Personal Profiling and identification of local education and training opportunities matching the Personal profile.

Share What Happened:

Before starting the registration process allowing the learners to sign up to MyFuture+ I explained that as an Administrator I would have access to all of the information generated by them completing any of the Career Apps and any additional information/documents that they might choose to store in their individual career files. This generated a discussion on issues of privacy and information security which provided useful feedback in the context both of protecting the individual learner/client and in relation to GDPR in general.

Because the workshop was delivered in the context of the Work Experience module I focused on the following Apps.

Career Sectors; Careers Interest Profiler: The reports generated by this App were used by the tutor and the learners to complete their assignments as was the report generated by the Personality App. Other features of the resource highlighted were the Jobs Search as all of the learners are actively job-seeking on an ongoing basis and the Further Education Career Tool which allows our learners direct access to local and general course information.

Identify Any Key Challenges:

As the group were a mixed ability group, particularly in relation to IT skills the level of learner confidence in using MyFuture+ varied considerable across the group and the engagement experience was less positive and less productive for those with less developed IT skills. Elements of almost all of the Apps used on the day required a lot of individual hands-on learner support and direction which has implications for group size. The level of independent, self-directed engagement with the various Apps explored on the day was varied. One ESOL learner, with previous educational experience above QQI Level 6 was very proficient in using MyFuture+, despite a reliance on Google Translate, and had

time on the day to explore career Paths, courses etc. linked to her Interest Profiler Report. Other learners were less confident in navigating the site independently and choose the option of coming to the Guidance Service individually to complete some tasks necessary for completion of their assignments.

Strengths and Potential:

MyFuture+ provides access to a very practical, comprehensive, relevant and up-to-date resource package which supports Learners both on a group and individual basis, enables collaboration among staff colleagues in the delivery of programmes and promotes engagement with the Adult Guidance service in the best interests of the learner. The potential of this resource to allow for a level of client/learner independence through self-directed learning and careers guidance is impacted by a variety of factors including level of IT skills, access to the Internet; level of comfort re issues pertaining to privacy; general dislike and fear of technology and feeling invisible in the online process.

There is such a wealth of information available on MyFuture+ it is important to establish client/learner needs initially and to tailor the resource to those needs to avoid information overload leading to confusion and disengagement. Depending on where the client is on their learner journey striking a balance between what is a very useful resource and maintaining the integrity of the client relationship within the Guidance process is paramount.

Key Outcomes:

The development of the MyFuture+ resource supports and promotes the following:

- Self-directed learning.
- Increased levels of Learner independence and autonomy in their individual learning journey.
- Collaboration
- Access to relevant and up-to-date information.
- Support
- Engagement with the Adult Guidance service.

Conclusions

The value of gathering both quantitative and qualitative data is evident in this report as the figures and charts are contextualised and complemented by the rich descriptions and details in the qualitative returns. While the AGMS in its past format can be improved, the strengths of it concern the breadth of data it has captured, from demographic client data and client feedback, to in-depth and detailed practice issues and case studies.

The findings from the analysis of the AGMS data contributes to an ever-growing body of evidence for practice and it highlights both key strengths and challenges in adult guidance in Ireland, which can inform professionals at policy, practice and research levels.

In terms of challenges highlighted in this report, the increasingly low staffing levels appear to have had a number of implications, such as: fewer services submitting their AGMS qualitative returns; some services not having time to follow up with clients to gather client feedback; and outreach provision and other activities being limited. Additionally, after the FET reform and the amalgamation of VECs into ETBs, some AEGS reported that local management placed greater emphasis on student recruitment rather than impartial guidance counselling provision. The AEGS perception of a lack of a central and national coordination of services in later years also appear to have resulted in confusion at local level.

Nonetheless, the data provided identifies significant strengths of the holistic model of guidance service provided by the AEGS, including the vast number of beneficiaries of one-to-one guidance, group guidance and information, as well as the recorded progression within and beyond FET. The benefits of this model of guidance service are particularly evident in the client feedback and in the qualitative returns. Finally, the data identifies that this model of guidance service includes impartial and person-centred support, which in turn requires the support of national and regional management. Such support would maximise collaboration with key local, regional and national stakeholders and an ability to be proactive as well as responsive to economic, societal and policy changes.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Adult Educational Guidance Services

Cavan and Monaghan ETB County Cavan County Monaghan	Cork ETB Cork City County Cork
City of Dublin ETB Dublin City South West Dublin Inner city Dublin North Central East Dublin North West Tallaght	Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB Dun Laoghaire South Dublin Fingal West Dublin
Donegal ETB County Donegal	Kerry ETB County Kerry
Galway & Roscommon ETB City of Galway County Galway County Roscommon	Kildare & Wicklow ETB County Kildare County Wicklow
Kilkenny & Carlow ETB County Kilkenny County Carlow	Laois and Offaly ETB County Laois County Offaly
Limerick and Clare ETB County Clare County Limerick Limerick City	Longford and Westmeath ETB County Longford County Westmeath
Louth and Meath ETB County Louth County Meath	Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB County Leitrim County Mayo County Sligo

Appendix B. Qualitative Returns Changes

There have been four different versions of the Qualitative Returns during the 2004-2018 time period:

2004 – 2007 (quarterly)

- Team/advisory/management composition
- Outreach
- Local Networking
- Marketing
- Database of education and training opportunities & use of ICT
- Gaps in Learning Provision
- Key Barriers for clients
- Key Issues / Challenges and how they are managed
- Best Practise
- Percentage of satisfied clients

2008 – 2010 (quarterly)

- Team/advisory/management composition and meetings help
- Outreach
- Local Networking
- Activities addressing Social Inclusion
- Activities addressing Gender Equality
- Use of ICT
- Gaps in Learning Provision
- Key Barriers for clients
- Key Issues / Challenges and how they are managed
- Issues emerging from Client Feedback.
- Best Practise

2011 (biannually)

- Team/advisory/management composition and meetings help
- Contribution to projects initiated by VEC/WIT
- Contribution to community projects
- Client feedback
- Ways in which the team is affirmed in their work
- Team reflection on service contribution
- CPD needs
- Team reflection on work process
- Most valuable work identified
- Case study
- Use of externally and internally developed resources
- Future goals, plans and strategic planning
- The process of completing the qualitative returns

2012 – 2018 (biannually)

- Team composition and additional/contracted practitioners
- How client feedback informs practice
- Case studies
- Key priority areas
- CPD needs

Appendix C. Current NFQ level

Table Current NFQ level (%)

NFQ	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Low	High	Diff
1	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	2.5	2.1
2	13.5	13.4	15.4	13.4	12.4	10.9	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.7	10.3	9.6	9.0	8.2	6.7	6.7	13.5	6.8
3	16.8	17.6	16.9	17.5	17.6	16.9	18.5	18.0	17.0	16.7	16.8	16.8	16.2	14.2	12.9	12.9	18.5	5.6
4	9.4	10.9	11.6	10.6	11.9	14.2	13.5	15.9	15.6	15.9	15.5	14.7	16.0	14.9	14.9	9.4	16.0	6.6
5	31.7	30.9	30.6	32.8	33.7	34.6	36.4	36.2	37.3	36.7	37.5	38.3	37.2	39.2	39.6	30.0	39.6	9.6
6	2.1	2.0	2.5	2.3	2.7	3.1	2.7	2.5	3.6	3.2	3.5	3.2	3.4	3.9	3.9	2.0	3.9	1.9
7	3.2	2.8	2.1	2.4	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.9	1.9	2.5	1.5	3.2	1.7
8	3.1	4.0	3.8	3.0	3.4	3.3	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.4	3.7	3.7	3.6	4.9	5.9	3.0	5.9	2.9
9	1.9	1.3	1.7	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.9	2.6	1.2	2.6	1.4
10	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.3
Other	15.6	14.3	13.1	14.2	13.0	12.9	11.8	10.4	10.4	10.8	9.2	10.3	10.6	10.5	10.5	9.2	15.6	6.4