



*Guidance Counselling
in the FET Sector - A
Vision Statement*

Preface

In this document, we, the Adult Guidance Association, outline a concise account of our members' vision for a strengthened and improved adult guidance counselling service in the FET sector.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on Irish economic and social life, AGA members continue to work with ETB pre-entry and current learners, as well as provide career support to those navigating a challenging labour market. We will also continue to rely on the support we receive from the 16 ETBs, as well as NCGE, ETBI, IGC, AONTAS, SOLAS and Careers Portal.

Adult guidance services have been, and continue to be, both proactive and responsive in terms of societal and financial changes, including the Covid-19 pandemic. While remote guidance has featured in AEGS practice in the past, it is becoming ever more important during times of necessary social distancing measures. We are also acutely aware that policy responses to an unemployment crisis impact on the role and delivery of adult guidance to clients in our communities. Indeed, recent policies reiterate the vital role of career guidance and also support the development of strong working partnerships with all stakeholders.

For example, SOLAS' (2020) 'Skills to Compete' document recognises the current work of guidance counsellors and proposes that guidance professionals work to "identify skills gaps and personal pathways as part of the future approach". Likewise, in the 'Job Loss Response Protocol' (March, 2020), the DES/DEASP/DBEI placed guidance centrally in the recovery process and they called for 'seamless co-operation' between DEASP, ETBs, trainers, educators, and career advisors. Furthermore, IBEC has also explicitly recognised the importance of a lifelong guidance service in their 2020 'Reboot and Reimagine Campaign'.

While national strategy, policy and protocols are central to the national plan for moving forward, a top-down approach alone cannot deliver the desired outcomes. Connecting with the services and practitioners, which in turn are informed by their clients, through a bottom-up approach, ensures that all our needs can be considered.

Moreover, a crisis is a time when having well-defined core values and a clear vision matter most, which is why we believe that publishing this vision statement in 2020 is particularly timely.

Catherine Greene,

Chairperson

2020, on behalf of the National Executive of the Adult Guidance Association.

This AGA Vision Statement has been developed with the help of Independent Consultant Researcher Dr. Petra Elftorp.

Introduction & Context

The purpose of this Vision Statement is to outline the vision of the Adult Guidance Association (AGA) for adult guidance counselling in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector, and to inform stakeholders of our role and value in the wider society.

AGA, previously known as Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland, or AEGAI, is a professional body representing guidance counsellors and information officers working in the FET sector in Ireland.

The Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) is the cornerstone of adult guidance counselling provision in the FET sector. This was also acknowledged by the Government and SOLAS in the FET strategy 2014-2019 (SOLAS 2014), where the AEGS was identified as a best practice model and as the 'building block' on which future FET guidance services should be built – sentiments which we also hold, but with certain caveats which are outlined in this document.

To give some context, the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI) was originally established in the year 2000 in response to the proposal in the White Paper (DES 2000) as it recognised that adult guidance plays a vital role in the lifelong learning model by enabling adults to make educational, work and life transitions in a fast moving technological and information based society. The services, known as AEGS, currently provide a professional, free of charge and impartial national service in 37 different locations and through outreach provision, under the management of the 16 ETBs nationwide. AEGS staff are also supported by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) which facilitates in-service training, resource materials and the digital client management system used in all services.

The service is provided to adults at the pre-entry, entry, ongoing, pre-exit and follow-up stage for those engaged in adult education and training. The services operate on a full-time, year round, objective, professional and quality-assured basis. Whilst the current structure has certain strengths, local services are often under-funded and the guidance provision across FET has become increasingly inconsistent and inequitable.

Abbreviations

AEGI	Adult Education Guidance Initiative
AEGS	Adult Education Guidance Services
AGA	Adult Guidance Association
BTEI	Back To Education Initiative
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ETB	Education and Training Board
FET	Further Education and Training
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
ETBI	Education Training Boards Ireland

Our Vision for FET Guidance Counselling- Key Objectives

A centralised national service. One national service with a national budget, and with regional/local services across the country, is a structure which can facilitate a more unified and equitable delivery of lifelong guidance counselling. Likewise, Indecon (2019:66) stated that “A key objective should be to provide a consistent level of career guidance regardless of location or type of FET programme”.

A distinct professional identity. To build and maintain trust from the public and FET learners, we need to ensure that guidance counselling is provided by professional and qualified guidance counsellors. FET guidance counsellors have long been employed under different professional titles and different types of contracts (e.g. permanent, fixed term and CID) and no contract, and this lack of a distinct professional identity carries the risk of demoralisation and a fragmented professional role may also damage the public’s trust in our profession (Neary 2016).

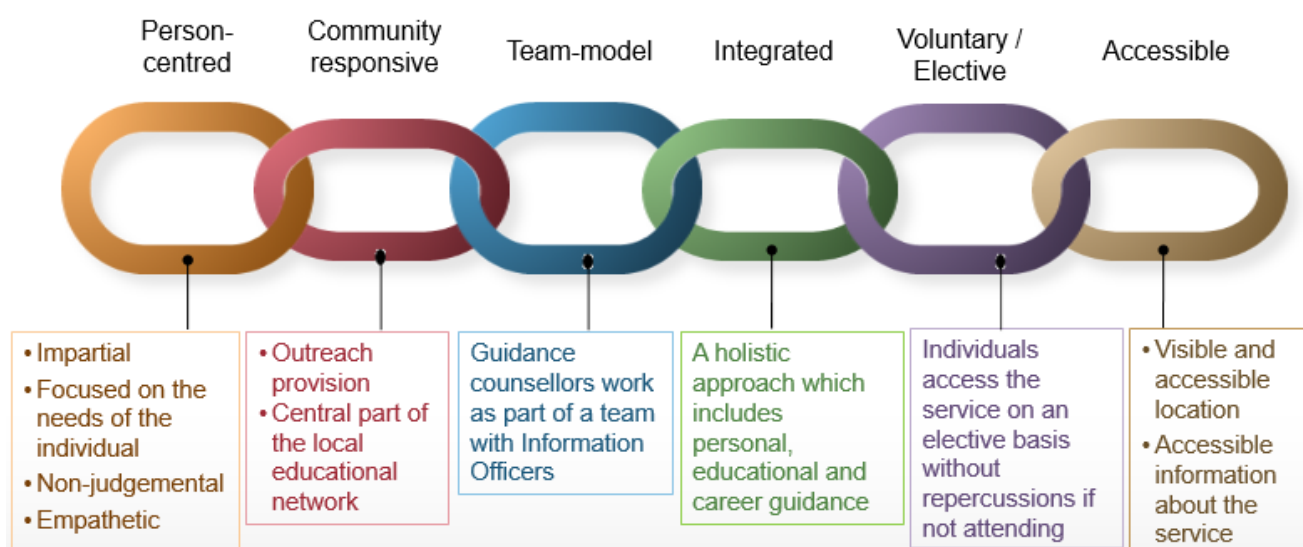
Retain and strengthen the ‘model’. The model of adult guidance in the AEGS has been identified as best practice and is a strength of the current system. It is essential that the FET Adult Guidance Services have both dedicated **information personnel and guidance counsellors who work as part of a team**, whilst being embedded in the community. It is also important that Individuals who access services remain **autonomous in their own decision making** and that they are consulted at each point of referral to, from and between agencies. (See further under ‘*Our Vision for a Model of Adult Guidance Counselling Provision in the FET Sector*’)

Capture the real value. It is important that we capture different types of data in relation to client progression and the impact of guidance, through the development of the new FET GMS/database. It must be recognised that the value of the service is not always *directly* related to employment levels. Guidance counselling also facilitates and helps people to reach their potential and take steps towards positive change through personal development and/or education.

Establish an interdepartmental approach. There is an urgent need for a coherent national long-term guidance counselling policy (Indecon 2019). Guidance counselling is a service which spans many government departments, for example the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (e.g. future skills needs, Labour Market Information), Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (e.g. referrals to and from employment services/Intreo), and to the Department of Health (e.g. referral of students/clients who have health/mental health issues and those working in the Supported Employment services).

A well-resourced and accessible service. FET guidance counselling services must be invested in and resourced sufficiently, as they have long been under-resourced and under-staffed (IGC 2020; NCGE 2018). A well-resourced service can offer quality guidance provision and reach more vulnerable and excluded individuals – those who need guidance the most!

Our Vision for a Model of Adult Guidance Counselling Provision in the FET Sector



Person-centred

The needs of the individual are at the centre of any guidance provision, which means that the guidance service is always impartial, non-judgemental and empathetic.

Community responsive

Outreach provision allows guidance services to be community responsive. It is also vital that the guidance service is a central part of the local educational network.

Team model

Guidance counselling should be provided by a team inclusive of professionally qualified guidance counsellors and information officers who collaborate on a daily basis to provide an effective and efficient service.

Integrated

An integrated, or holistic, model of guidance counselling includes personal, educational and career guidance. The advantage of this model is that it reflects the nature of lifelong career development, where personal, educational and career concerns intersect and cannot be easily separated.

Voluntary / Elective

Ethical guidance counselling must always be voluntary. That is, that individuals are not required to access guidance counselling services but do so on a voluntary basis with no repercussions if they choose not to access the service. This aspect of the model distinguishes adult guidance from employment services and thereby help build a trusting relationship with the person seeking guidance.

Accessible

The geographical location of the guidance service should be accessible and visible in the community. Information about the service and how to access it should also be available online and through other agencies and services.

Our Vision for the Range of FET Guidance Provision

Guidance counselling should be a comprehensive and holistic service, delivered on a **one-to-one** and **groups** basis, **face-to-face** and **remotely**. Some of the core provisions are outlined here:

Client-Centred Provision	Informing	Providing information about education, training and career opportunities, Labour Market Information and employer linkages.
	Advising	Helping clients to interpret information and make well-informed decisions – to integrate systemic knowledge.
	Counselling	Helping clients to discover, clarify, assess and understand their own career, educational and/or personal needs.
	Assessing	Psychometric testing - for skills, aptitudes, occupational interests, values, and personality for example.
	Preparing for Education & Employment	Providing learning experiences which help clients develop Career Management Skills (CMS), i.e. knowledge, skills and competencies related to transitions in their career, educational or personal progression.
	Enabling	Empowering clients to deal with agencies or institutions related to learning or employment opportunities.
	Advocating	Negotiating with agencies and institutions on behalf of clients.
	Facilitating Applications	Providing information and advice related to applications for education, training and employment.
	Providing Information and Funding Supports	Supporting individuals in locating funding sources and refer to appropriate funding services/agencies as required.
	Outreaching	Providing guidance to populations who might not otherwise have access to guidance services due to geographical and social factors.
Service / Management	Networking	Establishing local, regional and national links with a range of stakeholders and support agencies to enhance guidance work with clients.
	Linking with Employers	Linking with employers to promote greater connectivity and facilitate transitions between Education and work.
	Providing feedback / Data	Gathering and collating data. Using a Client Management System to build an evidence base.
	Managing	Coordinating and developing the human and physical resources to provide a coherent and effective programme of guidance activities.

Unique Strengths

<p>VALUE</p> 	<p>Adult guidance and information services have substantial value and benefit both the individual and the wider economy as it can mitigate socio-economic disadvantage and enhance individuals' educational retention rates and employment opportunities (Indecon 2019; OECD 2018; Ibec 2020; SOLAS 2020).</p>
<p>QUALIFIED</p> 	<p>Staff in FET guidance services are highly trained at Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications, which is higher than many other jurisdictions where guidance counsellors are typically trained at undergraduate level (Career Development Institute 2019; CEDEFOP 2009; DES 2016).</p>
<p>BEST PRACTICE</p> 	<p>The AEGS model of guidance has been acknowledged by the DES/SOLAS (2014) as a model of best practice on which any future adult guidance services should be built.</p>
<p>EVIDENCE BASED</p> 	<p>The Client Management System used in FET guidance services allows guidance counsellors to record important data in relation to the number of beneficiaries of the service, progression of clients etc. Based on this data, management recognises that the AEGS "continues to have significant value in FET and ETB" (NCGE 2018:2).</p>
<p>PROACTIVE</p> 	<p>Guidance counselling, when resourced sufficiently, is not just reactive - it is proactive. In particular, one-to-one meetings in confidential settings and the time given to clients help prevent 'course hopping' and drop out and facilitates sustainable employment.</p>
<p>SKILLS</p> 	<p>Guidance counselling facilitates the enhancement of individual employability and the acquisition of Career Management Skills which are critical to managing one's own learning and work life paths (Council of the European Union 2008). It supports the development of an increased self-awareness of transversal skills which are critical in this unpredictable world of work.</p>
<p>ENABLING</p> 	<p>A person-centred, impartial approach enables adults to make meaningful, realistic and well informed educational, training and employment choices. Intergenerational benefits</p>
<p>INCLUSION</p> 	<p>Embedded in the community with highly developed networks, FET guidance services are trusted by service users and referral agencies. We actively deliver on the FET active inclusion goals by offering support to the most marginalised and disadvantaged.</p>

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