



Good afternoon,

Shane Rooney is my name, I am an Adult Education Guidance Counsellor and I am here today as Chair of the Adult Educational Guidance Association of Ireland (AEGAI) to advocate on behalf of clients of our service and members who deliver that service.

I work as Guidance Co-Ordinator for the Adult Educational Guidance and Information Service in Carlow town and am an employee of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training ETB (KCETB). KCETB supports the needs of vulnerable adult learners on a daily basis through their course and programme provision.

As an adult guidance service the AEGI is free to those who are unemployed and underemployed and all those out of work from aged 16 to post-retirement age in the community. The service is professional, impartial and confidential and person centered. We facilitate service users to achieve their career and learning goals as well as facilitating lifelong career management and resilience techniques. In other words we develop the individual's awareness of possibilities and match them with appropriate progression routes which enable them to construct their own career journey and achieve their desired career outcomes.

Funded through SOLAS and located with the 16 ETBS, these 39 AEGI services country wide (100 people approximately) work with in excess of 52,000 beneficiaries annually. The Guidance Counsellors in the AEGI are all professionally qualified to postgraduate level.

Many of our service beneficiaries find themselves in a vulnerable position for a myriad of reasons. Primarily we assist people to upskill by identifying suitable options and by sourcing the relevant up to date impartial information to help them overcome barriers. These barriers could include underlying learning difficulties, gaps in previous educational experience, financial constraints, family responsibilities, disability, mental health issues such as anxiety or depression, homelessness, drug or alcohol dependency and lack of self – confidence or self-belief.

Service users may have been referred to AEGI by DEASP Intreo case officers, ETB centre co-ordinators/managers and tutors, Occupational Therapists, Clinical psychologists, NEPS Educational Psychologists, homeless hostel key workers, direct provision centres, psychotherapists or through word of mouth by a friend or self-referral.

They may be long term unemployed and have multifaceted needs, may have dropped out of education between 16-18 years of age or they may be an adult who lost their job and finds that their current zero hour contract role does not fulfill their needs. Men and women who may have cared for young children or those who looked after elderly relatives and or now looking to upskill and reintegrate into the world of work also use our service.

We assist people to be actively involved in developing a career, to reacquaint themselves with the recent changes in the world of work and to develop career resilience and career management skills. We provide guidance counselling and support and facilitate applications for Education /training / apprenticeship /

traineeship opportunities. We help people to find appropriate work experience and internship placements and provide psychometric testing, CV preparation and information on rights and entitlements.

The 39 AEGI services are run on a budget of 6.55 million annually which is good value for money. Recently AEGI workloads have increased due to DEASP Intreo service referral protocol. AEGI updated operational guidelines necessitated increased levels of service provision. Also, the amalgamation of the ETBs resulted in expansion of guidance roles. Anecdotal evidence from AEGAI membership nationally highlights enormous strain being experienced by AEGI services and indicates that any increase in workload would necessitate increased resources.

In the ongoing career guidance review AEGAI sincerely hope that an interdepartmental approach will be taken and that our service can be appropriately resourced. The reality of the impact we make where we assist progression up the National Framework of qualifications (NFQ) can be seen not just in economic terms but in the ripple effect for communities where one person going to college can influence their family and wider community to pursue education and personal development as a means of exiting poverty and making an effective contribution to society.

We appreciate the opportunity to showcase the valuable contribution we make to vulnerable communities in helping them to take their place in society.