

# NCGE Vision for FET Guidance and Information Service

The opportunity now exists in Ireland to place the FET Guidance and Information Service at the heart of lifelong learning and to develop seamless, collaborative, and appropriate lifelong career guidance provision for everyone. This is achievable through consultation, collaboration, and cooperation among all the stakeholders involved, as this article outlines.

The National Centre for Guidance in Education's (NCGE) vision of career guidance in further education and training (FET) is founded on the principles and expertise in adult guidance across the range of FET provision. Whatever the final decisions on the FET college of the future or on developments in general tertiary education and training, the future of guidance in FET can be maximised, augmented, and informed by the experiences leading to the development of the sector, incorporating developments in career guidance nationally and globally, and reflecting significant considerations in the provision of information and guidance during the global pandemic.

What remains consistent are the imperatives of stakeholder communication, collaboration, cooperation, and professionalism, through which FET guidance and information service delivery can help drive the development of a dynamic and unique FET Guidance and Information Service for Ireland.

## Definition of guidance

Guidance, in this context, is defined by the European Commission as a continuous process that:

*enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences, and interests, to make educational, training, and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work, and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, guidance counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills.<sup>1</sup>*

As defined, guidance is not just the provision of online information or of one-to-one guidance



**Jennifer McKenzie**

Director, National  
Centre for Guidance in  
Education



**Mary Stokes**

FET Guidance  
Programme  
Coordinator, National  
Centre for Guidance in  
Education

counselling. Guidance must remain impartial and client-centred and must highlight *all* options in *all* institutions available to people. Guidance does not imply recruitment, or admissions services, because these operate at institutional level to encourage and support access to and enrolment in that institution.

In the context of FET Guidance and Information Services, we refer to the model of adult guidance to adults over 18, or over 16 if they left school early,<sup>2</sup> which has different legal and ethical practice obligations and can be informed by the adaptation of the NCGE post-primary Whole School Guidance Framework,<sup>3</sup> with the individual adult, student, learner, or client central to the development process.

### Policy context

It is vital to reflect on the legislation informing guidance provision in Ireland: the Education Act 1998.<sup>4</sup> It informed the development of guidance models in adult education: the Adult Education Guidance Initiative pilot and services, now the Education and Training Boards' Adult Educational Guidance Service (ETB AEGS).

The Education Act is crucial to the development of the NCGE Whole School Guidance Framework, establishing a whole-school, collaborative approach to the delivery of career guidance counselling that is effective, reliable, and professionally robust. The Act has implications for FET, obliging 'centres of education' to provide students with 'access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices'.

The model of adult guidance service provision referred to in the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) FET Strategy 2014–2019, section 10,<sup>5</sup> is the ETB AEGS model, incorporating impartial provision of information with professional guidance interventions. This model evolved since the publication of the Department's 2000 white paper 'Learning for Life'. Initially, the ETB AEGS began as pilot projects that informed and reflect the European standards outlined in the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network's (ELGPN) 'Effective quality assurance and evidence-based policy systems'.<sup>6</sup> It is vital to note, however, that the ETB AEGS are just one element of the wider FET guidance landscape.

**Integrated FET Guidance and Information Service has a significant contribution to make in building learner core competencies.**

In the FET Strategy 2014–2019, section 10 includes the 'Vision for Integrated FET Guidance and Information Service'. It outlines how the strategy will be evaluated and includes the following aspiration:

*Everybody who engages with FET, whether employed or unemployed or wishing to engage with FET for the purpose of learning, can access a high-quality career guidance, counselling and labour market information service.<sup>7</sup>*

Integrated FET Guidance and Information Service has a significant contribution to make in building learner core competencies in the areas of learning-to-learn and career-management skills. As a result of engaging in adult guidance, people will acquire specific knowledge, skills, and

competencies that will help them participate and succeed in their education, training, and employment goals.

More recently, the 2020 SOLAS FET Strategy, *Future FET: Transforming Learning*, states:

**“ NCGE proposes that a Whole of FET Guidance and Information Service Framework has the potential to forge an innovative, dynamic, and client-centred FET Guidance and Information Service.**

*Critical to facilitating lifelong learning pathways is the pivotal role of ETBs in providing guidance on education, training, employment, and careers to all within their regions ... ensure that impartial guidance is available to all who seek it within the ETB region.<sup>8</sup>*

The SOLAS Adult Literacy for Life Strategy 2021, under Pillar Four: Empower, cites the important role of guidance:

*Person-centred Pathways: The adult guidance and information service ... within ETBs will play an important role in supporting and linking people to the supports needed. Ongoing guidance and information will be key to providing responsive and flexible progression learning pathways at whatever point in people's lifelong learning journey they are needed.<sup>9</sup>*

In considering a FET Guidance and Information Service and its potential, it is limiting and outdated to reflect only on the environment of adult learning. The environment in which FET exists, in the context of tertiary education and of training systems, is one that encompasses all adults, communities, and society, with informed choice as a facilitator of citizenship, belonging, and purpose for everyone in Ireland. Of course, as a nation we are in the EU and share the vision of the global community for a free and fair society.

NCGE proposes that a Whole of FET Guidance and Information Service Framework has both the potential and the capacity to forge an innovative, dynamic, interdepartmental, integrated, accountable, and client-centred FET Guidance and Information Service.

The ETB AEGS, as established and professional adult guidance and information services, successfully blend a public-facing impartial service role with considerable in-programme support. It is vital now to build the connections across existing guidance counselling support in FET colleges of further education, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, Youthreach / Community Training Centres (YR/CTCs), training centres, and apprenticeships.

The collaborative construction of FET Guidance and Information Services will need clarity of purpose and function, responsibilities, and connectivity that can be enhanced through national policy development, national and regional leadership, expert oversight, and the provision of supports such as supervision and professional development. A FET Guidance and Information Service provides an opportunity for ETBs to lead regional access to information and supports for applications for everyone, facilitating access to FET, higher education, apprenticeships, upskilling, career development, and emerging career-guidance needs.

What is imperative, and will demand consultation across the sectors, is to build understanding, knowledge, and trust among guidance professionals, and to promote guidance awareness for FET staff, for social, community, and welfare services, and, most significantly, for service users.

Critical to professional guidance provision is the Programme Recognition Framework (PRF) published by the DES in 2016.<sup>10</sup> This document set out criteria and guidelines for providers of initial education programmes in guidance counselling whose graduates will work in guidance services in post-primary schools and FET. It also determined the subsequent national review of university programmes for guidance counselling qualifications – graduates are required to develop the competences to lead, plan, deliver, review, and evaluate the guidance service they offer to young people and adults. The PRF outlines the activities of guidance, thereby clarifying what guidance does and what a guidance service should deliver.

It is important, meanwhile, to remember that delivery of guidance services in many EU countries is often supplied through Public Employment Services (PES), implying an employment priority. The government's Pathways to Work Strategy 2021–2025 can be accelerated and enhanced through collaborative, cooperative, whole-of-government and interdepartmental approaches to service provision, harnessing existing expertise, referral systems, and collaborative activities at local level, to help everyone make informed choices about their education, training, and career at any point of their lives.<sup>11</sup>

 **Delivery of guidance services in many EU countries is often supplied through Public Employment Services (PES), implying an employment priority.**

### Current range of guidance provision in FET

Guidance and Information Services in the FET sector provide impartial information on careers and education, and one-to-one and group guidance, which help people to make informed educational, career and life choices. FET Guidance and Information Services are provided to adults aged 18 and over, and to those over 16 who have left school early.

Currently there is no formal, nationally agreed structures for coordination or cooperation across the guidance services provided in FET, which include ETB AEGS, colleges of further education (CFEs), PLC programmes, YR/CTCs, ETB training centres, adult and community education centres funded by other government departments, Youth Information Services, the Back to Education Initiative, and prison services.

Useful learning from the ETB AEGS is the principle of the 'guidance team', which enables different levels of responsibility and requirements to be attached to FET Guidance and Information Service roles. The provision of guidance counselling in CFEs and PLCs was developed and resourced as an adaptation of the post-primary guidance counsellor role, while guidance counselling in YR/CTCs reflects the application by YR/CTC Advocates of the 'wheel' model.

Dedicated, appropriately qualified specialist roles outlined in a 'whole-of-FET guidance team' approach could be developed to mirror the

post-primary ‘whole-school student support team’ underpinning the whole-school guidance approach.

### Guidance information, referrals, signposting: delivery, support

Key attributes of the ETB AEGS include the impartial, informed, integrated, networked role developed to date in the FET centres, in the community, in the region, and nationally. Improving understanding of what guidance does is a challenge, but it can be addressed by promoting understanding of the impartiality of FET Guidance and Information Services, engaging the public’s trust, and, through informed choice, engaging with FET and HE.

“ For programme-based guidance in FET, it is vital to ensure connections with the employment sector.

Promoting and understanding the specialist role of FET Guidance and Information is improved through inputs to existing training for, and collaborations with, adult learning champions, justice and equality agents, mentors, recognition of prior learning (RPL) coordinators and practitioners, and mental health and other support services, to ensure that guidance is linked appropriately.

For programme-based guidance in FET, it is vital to ensure connections with the employment sector, for example through the Regional Skills Fora, ensuring access to and understanding of labour-market information and research available, and connecting to key curriculum areas to ensure the effective development of learning-to-learn and career-management skills.

### Supporting digital access and digital, blended, and face-to-face FET Guidance and Information Service

The digital divide and society’s increasing reliance on one-stop shops and digital platforms for dissemination of information, application processes, and services pose significant and ongoing issues for adults at risk of social or educational exclusion. This is evidenced across a wide range of community and educational supports on the ground and is noted in consultations for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science’s (DFHERIS) Adult Literacy for Life strategy. The pandemic has accelerated the need for technology-enhanced systems and service delivery, but the digital divide remains a challenge with implications for equity and accessibility.

By using existing expertise and ongoing development of information provision, using blended approaches to guidance support and delivery, and capitalising on existing evidence-gathering and system incorporation, the FET sector can be a leader in the provision of an innovative, collaborative, accessible, yet personalised FET Guidance and Information Service for all.

The FET Guidance and Information Service (GIS) can facilitate access and promote inclusion, diversity, equity, participation, progression, and engagement for all adults, but it must be underpinned by the principles and models of guidance outlined in the table below.

<b>Model of FET Guidance and Information Service</b>	
<b>Principles</b>	<b>Systems and service delivery</b>
Quality assurance (QA)	National and regional agreement on QA system informed by European and international standards in guidance provision Development of national guidance standards, guidelines for good practice, etc. Establishment of agreed career-management skills and career development modules to include competence development for all adults in areas of 'Developing myself', 'Developing my learning', 'My career path'
Practitioner training, qualifications Role descriptors Continuing professional development (CPD) and supervision	Agreed qualifications for guidance counsellors in accordance with Dept. of Education Programme-Recognition Framework; development of guidance-practitioner qualifications relevant to FET sector at NQF levels 6 and 7 as appropriate Clarifications of all guidance roles Provision of national and regional CPD and supervision for guidance counsellors/practitioners
Research Data- and evidence-gathering	Informed by academic research in career guidance/career development nationally and internationally Agreed system in place to support national and regional data-gathering for evidence, monitoring, and evaluations of FET GIS, with built-in interoperability with Programme Learner Support System (PLSS) and other relevant national systems Ensuring record and evidence of guidance provision to general public, <i>and</i> FET-registered learners, <i>and</i> those progressing to higher education or apprenticeship
Strategic planning	Dedicated strategic FET GIS planning integrated as a key element of ETB strategic planning nationally and regionally Collaboration, networking, and referral at regional or local level with relevant government agencies, Intreo, NGOs, support agencies, etc., as appropriate
National and regional developments	Developments agreed nationally and regionally with stakeholders in accordance with government policy, ETBs, higher education institutions, and Regional Skills Fora requirements National Advisory Group established with all relevant stakeholders, including DFHERIS, Department of Social Protection (DSP), SOLAS, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), NCGE, and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) staff, client, and employer representative groups, to agree national policy and strategy

<p>Integrated, collaborative, regional planning</p> <p>Resources and staffing</p>		<p>Coordinated, integrated provision at regional level to ensure collaboration of all FET-based guidance services, to ensure public-facing and in-course/in-programme-based guidance planning delivery, reporting, and evaluation</p> <p>Resources, budgets, and staffing agreed at national and regional levels to achieve strategic objectives, including: Regional/ETB guidance coordinator to support development of the coordinated 'whole-of-FET guidance' approach at ETB level, including coordination of service delivery in training centres</p> <p>Qualified guidance counsellors to deliver one-to-one and group guidance</p> <p>Appropriately trained guidance information staff, to ensure provision of accurate, impartial information to the public, registered learners, and online</p>
<p><b>Guidance and Information Service (GIS)</b></p>	<p><b>Delivered where and how?</b></p>	<p><b>Systems and service delivery</b> (informed by the Department of Education's Programme Recognition Framework 'Activities of Guidance Counsellors')</p>
<p>Pre-entry</p>	<p>Online information, using various multimedia systems and walk-in service to FET GIS; delivered on-site into course and programmes</p>	<p>Accessible national, regional, and local careers and education information accessible to everyone interested in FET, HE, apprenticeships, and EU options</p> <p>Information on RPL/NARIC application processes</p> <p>Introducing career and education research</p> <p>Referral to appropriate services, e.g., literacy, adult education, FET providers, HE access offices</p> <p>Access to labour-market information</p> <p>Self-referral and self-assessment career guidance service</p>
<p>Entry</p>	<p>On-site in FET GIS</p> <p>Online delivery where possible</p>	<p>Support for applications to education and career options; support for RPL/NARIC processes; establish personal career and/or education goals, and identify and achieve plans; develop career and education research and management skills; liaise with DSP to ensure eligibility, etc.</p> <p>Psychometric assessment for aptitude, interest, learning styles</p> <p>One-to-one guidance counselling to consider personal experiences and decision-making; referral and advocacy as appropriate</p> <p>Access to, understanding of, and integration of labour-market information</p>
<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>On-site in FET GIS</p> <p>Online delivery where possible</p> <p>On-site in FET course or programme, in collaboration with coordinators</p>	<p>Agreed at ETB level and locally and delivered in collaboration with and in support of managers, coordinators, or tutors</p> <p>Group guidance modules or information sessions scheduled into course timetable</p> <p>Development of career-management skills: career development modules to include career or education research skills</p> <p>Group and personal guidance counselling to support individual career or education decision-making and referrals where appropriate</p> <p>Psychometric assessment for aptitude, interest, learning styles</p> <p>Standardised work experience across FET, to include career guidance modules, interventions, reflection</p> <p>Access to, understanding of, and integration of labour-market information into personal career or education planning</p>

Pre-exit	On-site in FET GIS Online delivery where possible On-site in FET course or programme, in collaboration with coordinators	In collaboration with managers, coordinators, or tutors Group guidance or information sessions scheduled into course timetable Career development planning and job application processes, CV or Europass development, interview skills One-to-one guidance counselling to review and set personal career or education planning and application processes
Exit	On-site in FET GIS Online delivery where possible On-site in FET course or programme, in collaboration with coordinators	Considering personal career and education plans and support for transitions to next stage of education, training, work, etc. Client tracking and follow-up, offer of reconnect at further stages of adult lifelong learning or work transitions

## Conclusion

The provision of impartial information and guidance to the wider public, and the delivery of career-management skills development and guidance counselling supports through FET programmes, underpinned by international principles of guidance service provision, are achievable through consultation, collaboration, and cooperation of all the stakeholders involved.

The development of an ETB-based, integrated, publicly available, accessible, impartial, and person-centred FET Guidance and Information Service, with clarity of purpose and accountability, can serve a range of government, FET, and HE objectives by providing services that facilitate informed choices for all in lifelong education and training.

The opportunity now exists to truly place the FET Guidance and Information Service at the heart of lifelong learning in Ireland and to develop seamless, collaborative, cooperative, useful, and appropriate lifelong career guidance provision for all.

## ENDNOTES

1. Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting in the Council of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (Official Journal of the European Union, 2008). <https://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ%3AC%3A2008%3A319%3A0004%3A0007%3AEN%3APDF>.
2. Guidelines on Provision of AEGS to 16–17-year-olds (NCGE/DES, 2020). [www.ncge.ie/resource/guidelines-provision-aegs-16-17-year-olds](http://www.ncge.ie/resource/guidelines-provision-aegs-16-17-year-olds).
3. NCGE: A Whole School Guidance Framework (NCGE, 2017). [www.ncge.ie/resource/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework](http://www.ncge.ie/resource/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework).



4. Education Act 1998. [www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/print.html](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/print.html).
5. Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019 (SOLAS/DES, 2014, p. 112). <https://assets.gov.ie/24397/2a68611321f845ce90d4ab6e599e7313.pdf>.
6. Strengthening the Quality Assurance and Evidence Base for Lifelong Guidance (ELGPN, 2015, p. 6). [www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/ELGPN\\_QAE\\_tool\\_no\\_5\\_web.pdf/](http://www.elgpn.eu/publications/browse-by-language/english/ELGPN_QAE_tool_no_5_web.pdf/).
7. Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019 (SOLAS/DES, 2014, p. 19). [www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d219a-further-education-and-training-strategy-2014-2019/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1d219a-further-education-and-training-strategy-2014-2019/).
8. Future FET: Transforming Learning (SOLAS, 2021, p. 54). [www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas\\_fet\\_strategy\\_web.pdf](http://www.solas.ie/f/70398/x/64d0718c9e/solas_fet_strategy_web.pdf).
9. Adult Literacy for Life: a 10-year adult literacy strategy (DFHERIS, 2021, p. 58). [www.gov.ie/en/publication/655a4-adult-literacy-for-life-a-10-year-literacy-strategy/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/655a4-adult-literacy-for-life-a-10-year-literacy-strategy/).
10. Programme Recognition Framework: Guidance Counselling (Department of Education, 2020). [www.gov.ie/en/publication/dce0a0-programme-recognition-framework-guidance-counselling/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/dce0a0-programme-recognition-framework-guidance-counselling/).
11. Pathways to Work Strategy 2021–2025 (Department of Social Protection, 2021). [www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/).

---

## FURTHER READING

NCGE, Web Wheel Model. [www.ncge.ie/ncge/web-wheel-model](http://www.ncge.ie/ncge/web-wheel-model).

Aontas, The Communicating Europe Initiative Project – Learning for Change. [www.aontas.com/knowledge/blog/the-communicating-europe-initiative-project](http://www.aontas.com/knowledge/blog/the-communicating-europe-initiative-project).

OECD, Career Guidance for Adults in a Changing World of Work. [www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/career-guidance-for-adults-in-a-changing-world-of-work\\_9a94bfad-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/career-guidance-for-adults-in-a-changing-world-of-work_9a94bfad-en).

NCGE, Overarching research on data gathered in DE/DFHERIS/SOLAS/NCGE Adult Guidance Management System of the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative. [www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/NCGE-FET-AGMS-Overarching-Report-EN.pdf](http://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/NCGE-FET-AGMS-Overarching-Report-EN.pdf).

NCGE, Summary Report on ETB AEGS Case Studies 2019. [www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/Report-Case-Studies-AGMS-AEGS-2019.pdf](http://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/Report-Case-Studies-AGMS-AEGS-2019.pdf).

European Commission, Successfully organised TCA activity: 'Career guidance and counselling for students from vulnerable groups'. <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/content/successfully-organised-tca-activity-career-guidance-and-counselling-students-vulnerable>.

University College Cork, Adult Courses: Continuing Professional Development in Prior Learning for Adult and Community Educators. [www.ucc.ie/en/ace-ccpdpl/](http://www.ucc.ie/en/ace-ccpdpl/).

Department of Education and Skills, Adult Education Guidance Initiative (AEGI) Operational Guidelines 2012. [www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/ncge/uploads/AEGI\\_Operational\\_Guidelines\\_2012\\_\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ncge.ie/sites/default/files/ncge/uploads/AEGI_Operational_Guidelines_2012__FINAL.pdf).