



### **Information Service Analysis**

- To date a total of 5217 queries have been handled by AONTAS.
- 513 learners contacting the service over the last three months stated that there is a need for courses to be delivered during the summer months, so that people can continue to up-skill. 21% of these learners felt their only option during the summer months was to take a place being offered by a private course provider; which can often be very expensive and a further 15% of these learners were experiencing difficulty funding these courses and were unsure if they would be able to continue their education due to this financial expense.
- 42% of learners contacting the Referral Service were frustrated at that the lack of availability of courses. A further 13% of these who are unemployed stated that if this barrier was overcome it would once again give people a sense of purpose in these hard economic times.
- Once again there continues to be an increase in men accessing the Referral Service with approximately two thirds of the queries coming from men. There seems to be a growing interest in requests for courses on eco trades, sustainable building and renewable energy. Over 19% of men contacting the service over the past three months were looking for courses in this area.
- 36% of people contacting the service over the past three months felt that there needs to be a greater choice and greater diversification at local level. Almost all of these stated that there is a need for more courses for people rather than people for courses.
- 27% of all individuals contacting the service in 2009 have stated that there is no progression routes available for them in relation as-hoc short courses being delivered at local level.
- 119 people contacting the service since the start of August were considering going back to sit the Leaving Certificate at some point. However an overwhelming 89 of these stated that it is incredibly difficult as a mature student to go back to sit the leaving certificate due to the very limited availability of subject options outside of Second Level Schools.
- To date 24% of people contacting the AONTAS Information Referral Service have stated that courses being offered aren't suiting the needs of the newly unemployed

- 6 % of learners contacting the service over the past three months stated they had literacy difficulties and that there needs to be more short courses aimed specifically at people with literacy difficulties who are unemployed and need to have practical training prepare them for returning to employment.
- An overwhelming 81 learners contacting the service in August, September and October stated they were considering dropping out of their chosen courses due to the fear of not being able to retain their benefits while in education and due to the ongoing and upcoming cut backs in education and social welfare. In 2009 808 prospective learners had been given inaccurate information from frontline services in their localities.
- The majority of people contacting the service are considering returning to education due to losing their jobs in the down turn. To date 3572 individuals stated they were unemployed, 2791 of these indicated they were newly unemployed having lost their jobs in the past twelve months. Many of these individuals comment on suffering from low self-esteem lack of confidence.
- Finance and childcare continue to be a barrier for unwaged and unemployed individuals wishing to return to education this year. Many people recently unemployed are seeking to up-skill or retrain and their biggest concern is funding for courses and meeting childcare costs. In 2009 4591 stated they wanted information on course options and funding available to them.
- One growing area of concern for learners contacting us during August and September was the grant schemes. 204 individuals stated that they had been offered a course in July through the CAO and were unsure if they could take up their course however a worrying 14% of these learners stated they had actually turned down their place due to the late awarding of third level grants. This suggests that the awarding of grants at the end of September is simply too late for many people who need to know before they confirm their place whether or not they can afford to take up a course.
- The increase in the registration fees seems to be becoming a significant barrier for many learners. To date AONTAS has handled 52 complaints from people seeking to vent their anger about the impact of this increase on adult learners. A further 12 learners who were unemployed stated they would have difficult applying through the CAO due to the 90 euro application process fee.
- Over August and September 163 learners contacting the Referral Service declared their concerns about the introduction of full-time fees. Sadly 3% of these learners stated they had turned down their place due to the fear of having to pay these at some stage in the future.

- Feedback from the referral services suggests that accessing information continues to be a significant barrier for many adult learners – in 2009 71% of learners contacting the service have stated there is a need for clear, concise, accurate and accessible up to date information from front line services. This year 808 prospective learners contacting the Referral Service stated they were given inaccurate information at some stage in their quest for information from frontline services in their localities. A further 65 of these stated that they this had led to them losing a place on their chosen course.
- 37 queries were from people who were frustrated about their ineligibility for the Student Access Fund stating that this was their last hope to remain in college and funding their education.
- The majority of people contacting the service are from Leinster-3543 individuals stated they were from the Dublin area.
- In 2009 2437 individuals were hoping to return to full-time higher education and 2315 were seeking part-time courses.
- 4% of individuals contacting the service stated that they had been out of education for 5 years or less, however there continues to be an increase in of individuals contacting the service have been out of education for very long periods of time.
- 81% of all individuals contacting the service stated it has been more than ten years since they have been in education. 52% of these individuals have stated they had been out of education for more than twenty years with a further 4% of these have stated it has been more than 30 years since they were in education.
- The online facility for people to e-mail continues to be the main way in which people contact the Service and this year over 3824 people emailing the Information & Research Officer with queries.
- To date 5003 of all individuals contacting the Referral Service have requested a copy of the Information Booklet.
- 289 individuals contacting the Referral Service in August, September indicated that they had been turned away from adult education courses being delivered at local level due to the lack of places available and were now looking at pursuing Third Level.
- 105 of individuals contacting the service indicated there is a need for expansion of VTOS places – all of these stated there are a very limited number of VTOS places available.
- 77 individuals contacting the service stated the demand for PLC courses is not being met with the limited availability of these courses being delivered at local level.

- Whilst a further 316 individuals have stated that they are on waiting lists for adult education courses being delivered at local level.
- A further 29 people contacted AONTAS in relation to their course being cancelled after they had enrolled and started their courses in September.