



**AONTAS INFORMATION REFERRAL SERVICE-WEEKLY ANALYSIS**  
*15th December 2009*

AONTAS continues to deliver an Information Referral Service which provides both direct and referral information on adult education issues to individuals and groups. The success of the three previous years Adult Learners Festivals' coupled with increased media coverage and a stark increase in the number of unemployed people contacting us in line with the economic downturn has led to a continued increased in queries. The amount of queries now being handled by the Service has doubled since 2007. Over the past twelve months AONTAS has fielded 5671 calls from prospective learners seeking information on courses, entitlements and grants. When analysed, queries to the service over the past eleven months yield interesting insights on the current challenges in relation to adult education and lifelong learning.

The continued increase in calls indicates that AONTAS continues to be a very important starting point for many learners. Analysis of the queries shows that there were several peak periods for the Service; January, June, July and August. This is a stark contrast to previous years when summer months were generally quieter for the Referral Service. 529 learners contacting the Service over the last four months stated that there is a need for courses to be delivered during the summer months, so that people can continue to up-skill and stay motivated. From the figures for August and September 316 individuals stated they were on the waiting list for adult education courses. Individuals contacting the service continue to voice their concerns about the lack of courses available and the decreasing resources available at local level. A quarter of unemployed people contacting the AONTAS Information Referral Service stated that the courses available don't suit their needs. A third of all people contacting the service over the past three months feel that there needs to be greater choice and diversification at local level and a quarter of all individuals contacting the service in 2009 have stated that there is no progression routes available for them from ad-hoc short courses being delivered at local level.

The demographic of learners seeking courses has changed significantly, most notably the increase in unemployed young men with poor literacy levels. Approximately two thirds of queries handled this year were from men.

An overwhelming majority of people contacting the Service are considering returning to education due to losing their jobs in the down turn. To date 3590 individuals stated they were unemployed, 2807 of these indicated they were newly unemployed having lost their jobs in the past twelve months. 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 significantly longer 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. Many of these individuals comment on suffering from low self-esteem lack of confidence.

Feedback from the Referral Service suggests that accessing information continues to be a significant barrier for many adult learners. This year 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.

Finance and childcare continue to be a barrier for unwaged and unemployed individuals wishing to return to education this year. Many people recently unemployed that are seeking to up-skill or retrain have expressed that their biggest concern is funding for courses and meeting childcare costs. In 2009 4591 of all individuals contacting the service requested information on course options and funding available to them.

Currently I'm working on the 2010 version of the Information Booklet which will be available early in the New Year.

A full analysis of the outcomes of the Information Referral Service for 2009 will be available in January as part of the AONTAS Annual Report. In the mean time I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and a Merry New Year.

I would particularly like to thank all the learners who contacted us during the year and of course those who shared their inspirational stories with us.

Jenny Gunning  
AONTAS Information Officer