

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Adult Learner Fair 2014**

**Helping you find a brighter future…**

It’s the New Year and traditionally a time of new beginnings where we think of how we want our lives to be different this year. For many people education is a wonderful way of making changes you want in your life, be it retraining for a new career, brushing up on forgotten skills or simply taking up a new hobby or interest. You may also be feeling that you want to find your spark and create plans for the future or even fan the flames of success so that you can create the life you really want! The last few years have been very difficult for many but with green shoots now showing in the economy and more opportunities becoming available, it is an excellent time to find out all the opportunities that are available to you.

Donegal ETB is organising Adult Learner Fair 2014 which will be taking place in the Mount Errigal Hotel, Letterkenny on Wednesday, the 22nd of January, from 11am to 3pm.

For many adults in the County, the Adult Learner Fair is one of the most important annual events in the education calendar. This year is the eleventh anniversary of the Fair and the first one under the auspices of Donegal ETB, the new state body charged with bringing together for the first time, adult, further education and training.

We have decided to focus again this year on making the exhibition of education, training and support organisation our best yet where over 60 organisations will be providing information and advice on courses, training, education and support covering a range of programmes from return to learning through to access to third level education and beyond “we are really excited about this years event and we hope that the Fair will inspire adults to make informed decisions about their future - for those who need a little help in deciding what they would like to do experienced Guidance Counsellors will be on hand to point people in the right direction” says Seán Debney, Adult Guidance Co-ordinator with Donegal ETB.

The Fair will be of particular interest to those who are facing an uncertain time or are recently unemployed, those who are interested in returning to learning, maybe for the first time since leaving school, or for those who are on a course and want to find out where to go next. It will also be a great opportunity for those who are considering a career change or who want to improve their current job prospects.

This is a fantastic opportunity to find out everything you need to know about returning to education and at a time of year that gives you the time to plan how you are going to make it happen. For many people in Donegal, the Fair has been the place where they took the first step to a new and brighter future.

For further information on the Adult Learner Fair, please contact the Donegal Adult Learner Guidance Service, 2nd Floor, McKendrick Place, Pearse Road, Letterkenny. Tel: 074 91 78088.

**Making the most of Adult Learner Fair 2014…**

Adult Learner Fair 2014 is a fantastic opportunity to find out all you need to know about going back to education and training but with so much information available how can you make sure you find out everything that is important to you?

Dearbhla Kelly, Guidance Counsellor with Donegal ETB offers her Top 10 Tips for making the most of your visit to the Fair.

**Tip 1.** Take time out to reflect on what really matters to you in your life and career at this time. You may be feeling a little lost or feel that you have reached a crossroads in life; you maybe long term unemployed or have worked all your life and suddenly you have found yourself unemployed for the first time. You may be seeking direction or wanting a new personal goal for 2014.

Try and be as clear as you can about why you are going to the Fair and what you are looking for. If you are finding this difficult then before you go to the Fair ask yourself the following questions and have your answers to hand as you visit the exhibitors:

1. Do I have any dreams or unfulfilled career goals that I would like to achieve? If so what are they? Spend time seeking advice at the Fair as to how you might make these dreams and goals a reality.
2. What are my interests? What activities give me energy? Be clear about what motivates you and try and find opportunities at the Fair that are connected to your interests. It is much easier to engage in learning when you enjoy a subject.
3. Do I enjoy working with people, information, ideas, and things? Your answers to these questions when connected to what interests you will help you begin thinking about the kind of jobs and courses that you might want to do.
4. How confident am I about my current level of education and skills in relation to what I am interested in doing? What skills could I develop this year that will help me achieve my dreams and goals?
5. Could I improve my skills through volunteering or other activities this year? If so then have a look at Tip 8 and speak to the appropriate organisations at the Fair.
6. What time do I have available to pursue education and training opportunities? The answer to this will help you be clear about the format and duration of courses that will fit your current commitments. To be successful it is important to choose a course that will fit in with all the other aspects of your life.

Thinking about these questions will enable you to get clear about the level and type of course that will be manageable, challenging and interesting.

**Tip 2.** When you are at the Fair, look around you and notice all the other adults that are all in the same boat as you; looking for direction and new opportunities. Notice too, the variety of organisations, courses and supports that are available for adults going back to education and training. You are not alone!

**Tip 3**. If you are reading this article and you left school early and maybe you lack confidence in reading, writing, maths, computers and would like to brush up on your essential skills then visit the Donegal ETB stand and enquire about the help, support and free classes available. Perhaps you would like to improve your do not feel confident in IT, look around at local providers, Donegal ETB, SOLAS, Regional Employment Service, Rossan College. Perhaps, you are someone who is confident in learning and would like to return to third level college yet unsure of what you would like to specialise in. Then consider an access course at Letterkenny IT, North West Regional College in Derry or St Angela’s College, Sligo. These access courses/foundation courses will allow you to explore different subjects and will act as a bridge to learning at third level. Also depending on your results, they will allow you access onto a degree level courses.

**Example**

Tom, 58 had left school at 14 due to financial reasons. At a young age he started working on the sites in London and in the tunnels. All his life, Tom felt held back by his ability to spell and lack of confidence with paper work. Due to a back injury Tom returned to Ireland and found himself unemployed with a lot of time on his hands. Two years ago, Tom visited the Adult Learner Fair and was inspired to face his fears. He enrolled on a Learning For Living course where he worked on his confidence in writing. Today, Tom feels confident when filling out forms or dealing with Banks. He feels “ like a whole world has opened up to him”

**Tip 4.** You maybe over 23, have a leaving certificate or equivalent and have been out of work for a while and know that you really want study at third level. Then visit the third level colleges and universities such as Letterkenny IT, University of Ulster, North West Regional College, South West College and find out more about the course content and application process. Visit the Guidance Information Point to find out about CAO or UCAS applications and to speak with a guidance counsellor. When planning ahead, bear in mind the areas where current and future job opportunities exist. The IDA indicate that there are strong opportunities in technology, business services, science, engineering, financial services, languages and manufacturing/supply chain.

**Example**

John, 28 was an electrician living in West Donegal. In the boom times John was very successful However, due to the downturn in the economy John was made redundant. Last year John went to the Fair to find out what courses were offered by various colleges and then met with the Guidance Service to refine his options. He was keen to get his life going again in a good direction. He decided to start an access course in St Angela’s, Sligo This year John got a place on the marine science degree programme at NUI Galway and he hopes to work in marine research when he graduates. John is now excited about his future!

**Tip 5.** Perhaps you are at the Fair and you are worried about the cost of education, then visit the Department of Social Protection or Citizens Information stand regarding welfare and entitlements and SUSI regarding grants for PLC courses and third level courses.

**Example**

Darragh visited the first Adult Learner Fair in 2003 and looking back he said that all his needs were addressed under one roof. At the Fair, Darragh got all his financial queries regarding the Back to Education Allowance answered and established an interest in studying at NUI Maynooth. As result he enrolled on an Access Course in Maynooth which lead on to a degree and PhD in History. Eight years later, Darragh has been awarded his doctorate and today he lectures in Maynooth and is engaged in research with Oxford University. This is a far cry from his previous life as a petrol pump attendant!

**Tip 6.** You may not be interested in formal academic study and are looking for opportunities that are more practical in nature. Then consider colleges/organisations offering practical courses such as Letterkenny IT, Tourism College in Killybegs, College of Agriculture, Farming and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), Teagasc, North West Regional College, South West College, Sligo College of Further and Higher Education, The Organic Centre, North West Training Centre, and some of Community Education courses with Donegal ETB. Or you may even have a great business idea that you would like to explore with Donegal County Enterprise Board.

**Example**

Mary and Sean are a couple and were considering a new venture. They visited the Fair last year and they both enrolled on a horticulture course with Donegal ETB. Now they grow organic vegetables and are selling their produce at farmers’ markets. In 2014, they are hoping to supply some local restaurants with their organic produce!

**Tip 7.** Your focus might not be on education but on how to go about getting back into employment, you may have got all your previous jobs through word of mouth or you may feel you need to learn about jobsearch, CV’s and interviews techniques. If so, then visit Inishowen Development Partnership, Donegal Local Development Company and the Regional Employment Service stands for further information and support.

**Example**

Marie worked in retail for 28 years and came to the Fair last year feeling a bit downhearted. She left school at 16 and was a really good worker. She felt lost when it came to getting back out there to look for work. At the Fair she enrolled on the Winning New Opportunities Programme. Through that programme and with the help of Buncrana Job Club she found new confidence in looking for work.

**Tip 8.** Perhaps you are one of many who feel the day is long and feel isolated or maybe you feel that you are stuck. Then get moving by building up your skills and expanding your network through volunteering. The Volunteer Centre, St Vincent de Paul, Civil Defence, Doorway Project, Cara House among many others would appreciate your time and talents. Volunteering is a great way to build your teamwork skills, communication, problem solving and ability to be flexible. A recent survey of 100 companies by Dublin City University highlighted the value placed by employers on volunteering and work experience as a vehicle to build skills for the workplace.

**Example**

Paul 41, was an ex digger driver. For many years he wanted to become a Paramedic. However, he needed some practical experience. Last year, he signed up with the Civil Defence. In the Civil Defence he gained excellent practical skills in First Aid and in responding to accidents. This really boosted his confidence and helped him at the interview stage for Paramedics.

**Tip 9.** You might be thinking you just want to get out of the house and do something for fun, then consider all the hobby courses such as tai chi, gardening, art, dance on offer at Cara House, Letterkenny Women’s Centre, Inishowen Development Partnership, Donegal Local Development, Donegal ETB, Rossan College and North West Regional College.

**Example**

Violet was a pensioner and at 78 she dreamed of mastering the internet. She got a gift of an ipad however she did not know how to navigate the internet. She wanted to be able to book trips, pay bills and communicate with her grandchildren in Australia. In 2013, she signed up for a Level 3 Office Skills Course. Today, she is on Skype, emailing friends and shopping online. The course gave her a great focus, new skills, new friends and a new sense of herself!

**Tip 10.** Unemployment brings with it stresses and some people can feel low when not working. Others grieve the working life they had. If you feel that you are struggling, then many supportive organisations are at the Fair such as HSE Health Promotion, Grow, Parent Stop, MABS, St Vincent de Paul, Mental Health Ireland and the Pastoral Centre in Letterkenny. Know that you are not on your own and there are people there to help you.

After all of this if you are still saying to yourself “I still haven’t a clue about what I want to do” then visit the Guidance Information Point for guidance, direction or even a further appointment to discuss your best options. Also remind and reassure yourself that it is normal during periods of transition to be unsure where to go next.

If you have been affected by the downturn, we would encourage you to focus your efforts into creating a new direction for yourself. We realise that this can be both a daunting and exhilarating situation where the challenges of being ‘outside the comfort zone’ is balanced by the excitement of starting something new. So come along and step into a new opportunity at Adult Learner Fair 2014 on Wednesday, 22nd January at the Mt Errigal Hotel, Letterkenny.