

National Centre for Guidance in Education

Assessment of the Use of Information Technology in Guidance in Post Primary Schools

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Summary of Results

Guidance Counsellors in 729 post primary schools received a self-completion questionnaire to assess access to and the existing provision and use of information technology in guidance. 353 guidance counsellors returned the questionnaire. The following findings¹ are based on their responses:

- 69% of respondents use a computer in their work;
- Students have access to a computer for guidance in 53% of the schools; higher levels of access are associated with the seniority of the class;
- In terms of computer competency, more than half of the guidance counsellors rated themselves at either the level of a beginner or as having no skills (40% & 12% respectively);
- While 63% of respondents use an IBM (PC) type computer, just over half of these are Pentiums. Three percent use Apple Mac; 31% have a modem; and 55% have a CD-ROM drive;
- Use of software packages specifically for guidance was low relative to use of other types of packages;
- The most popular use of the internet with regard to guidance was to access careers information; however only 16% of the respondents used the internet for this purpose;
- Qualitative answers expressed an urgent need for training in computer competency and adequate resources for the purchase of appropriate hardware and software for guidance;
- Responses also revealed a lack of information and computer competency to use the IT resources already in place.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the results of this survey, the National Centre for Guidance in Education makes the following recommendations with respect to the provision of information technology for guidance in post-primary schools:

- Guidance counsellors should be provided with a computer that is **dedicated to use for guidance**, with the necessary **specifications to use the latest guidance software and to allow Internet access** e.g. CD-ROM drive, modem, sufficient memory etc.
- Schools should be encouraged to promote **student access** to computers for guidance, for both junior and senior cycles, not only on a one-to-one basis in the guidance room, but also in a classroom situation.
- The need for **training** in the use of IT for guidance should be addressed urgently. Training courses ranging from basic computer skills to advanced use of software and the Internet should be provided on an on-going basis.
- Specifically, guidance counsellors need **information about and training in the use of guidance software and the Internet**. They also need to be provided with the **resources to purchase software** and the **time** to learn how to use it.
- Training courses alone are not sufficient; guidance counsellors should be provided with **support and back-up** in the use of both computer hardware and software, in particular the guidance packages.

¹ Not all respondents answered every question, however for the purpose of comparability all percentages are based on the sample of 353 guidance counsellors who responded to the questionnaire.

Introduction

Use of Computers and the Internet for Careers Guidance

The school's guidance programme offers many opportunities and possibilities for benefiting from information and communications technology. Guidance has been defined by the Department of Education and Science (Department of Education, 1996) as a range of activities and interventions which can assist students to make choices-educational, career, personal/social-about their lives. These activities include counselling, information-giving, assessment, vocational preparation, consultation and referral.

Computers –assisted guidance and the Internet can be used in a number of ways in vocational guidance and counselling. They enable students to become aware of **opportunities**; to become aware of **themselves** in a structured way; to **match** themselves with opportunities; to examine their **decision-making** styles; and to learn **planning and job search** skills. All of the above can also be done using the Internet and World Wide Web.

Guidance software, in the form of **databases**, provides information on vocational education and training courses and institutions, higher education courses and institutions, employers, job vacancies, CVs of job seekers, work experience placements, voluntary work opportunities, qualifications, transnational opportunities and working conditions, occupations and labour market information, and sources of funding. These databases provide a user-friendly way to promote awareness of opportunities in education and the labour market.

Self-awareness software attempts to measure/ describe a number of different aspects of the student: occupational interests and preferences, work and other values, scholastic and occupational aptitude, personality/temperament, learning style, and work and transferable skills. Some software enables students to build a picture of them selves using their own self-constructs and words. Certain software packages in this category are standardised psychometric tests.

Other guidance software incorporates the two previously described, **matching self-awareness and opportunity awareness**, leading to education, training and job ideas related to one's abilities and interests. As with the previous category, some self-assessment questionnaires are standardised psychometric tests while others are not. Most of the software in this category match one's self to occupations, while others match to learning opportunities in education and training, job vacancies, or less commonly leisure activities and hobbies.

Decision-making software enables students to become aware of their own decision-making styles, the variety of factors they use in decision-making, and the application of these to a particular decision. Such software includes prioritising, challenging and exploring values and attitudes, decision-learning games and reality testing (using simulation).

Further on in the guidance process, **planning and implementation** software involves planning of the immediate, short-term and long-term steps, and the skills needed for these. Examples of this type of software include action planning, CV writing, interview skills, job seeking, and job application letter writing.

Many of the uses of software described above are now possible through **the Internet and World Wide Web**. The WWW has contributed very much to the globalisation of the workforce especially through employment agencies and employers, particularly where skill

shortages exist. National employment services also use WWW for the same purposes. Increasingly the WWW is used by institutes of vocational education and training and higher education to inform people about their courses. The Web is also a very useful source of information on guidance practice and materials used across the world.

Apart from using software as part of the guidance process, computers and the Internet offer many possibilities for guidance practitioners to **improve their practice** through creating their own databases of client information; to consult guidance materials; to benefit from distance learning; and particularly to collaborate and communicate with employers, employment services, education and training institutions, and fellow-professionals. They can also aid in the **general administration** of the guidance practitioner's daily work e.g. writing references, handouts, and letters.

There are four elements in any strategy for the use of computers and the Internet in the guidance process: hardware, software, training and support. Each of these elements has equal status. Without training and support for guidance practitioners, the use of computers and the Internet in the guidance process is far less efficient, and the hardware and software provision cannot be used to its full potential.

Information and communications technology has tremendous benefits and potential for use throughout the entire guidance process. **The use of IT in guidance is therefore, a very important element of any strategic plan for guidance provision.**

The Present Study

The present study arose from the Action Plan for Guidance being jointly developed by the National Centre for Guidance in Education and the Department of Education and Science. The National Centre undertook to identify the current provision and future needs of the use of ICT for guidance in post-primary schools. The survey examined issues of access, hardware, software, training, and support for computer-assisted guidance. The National Centre has been involved in many initiatives in this field since its establishment in 1995. These include:

- **Hosting the EU Irish Presidency conference “Guidance in the Information Society”;**
- **Publishing and distributing two publications arising from that conference;**
- **Participation in three LEONARDO DA VINCI pilot projects related to the use of the Internet and the WWW for guidance;**
- **Developing its own Web site and training its staff in web site editing;**
- **Providing in-service training for guidance counsellors in the use of computer-assisted guidance;**
- **Evaluating guidance software packages;**
- **Adapting standards for Ireland for guidance software products;**
- **Grant aided the production of Ireland's first multimedia careers product;**
- **Grant-aided innovations in QUALIFAX, the database of vocational, technical and higher education in Ireland;**
- **Publishing support and training materials for computer-assisted guidance;**
- **Distributing externally produced ICT support materials to guidance counsellors.**

The National Centre's web site is part of the Centre's own strategy for publicising its activities, disseminating its publications, and acting as a gateway to relevant guidance sites nationally and globally.

The results of the study will be used to advance the Action Plan for Guidance. They will form the basis of a proposal to the Schools IT2000 initiative of the Department of Education and Science in order to fund significant improvements to the use of computer-assisted guidance in post-primary schools in terms of hardware, software, training and support.

Methodology

A self-completion questionnaire was distributed to Guidance Counsellors in 729 post-primary schools to assess the existing provision and use of information technology for guidance in post primary schools with a view to developing a proposal to the Department of Education and Science in relation to its IT 2000 Programme. Of the original 729 questionnaires 353 were returned – a response rate of **48%**. This rate compares favourably with those of other postal questionnaires where, in certain situations, a response of 15% is often considered good (Harper, 1971:21). However, due to the considerable IT content of the survey, it may be likely that those who did not respond are those who have not got access to a computer, so figures for access to and use of a computer etc. may be somewhat inflated.

The questionnaire (see appendix A) was divided into 5 sections: Access to Computers, Training, Hardware Details, Software Details & Support in Using IT. At the end of each section of closed questions, respondents were asked an open-ended question about their needs in regard to that section. Quantitative data on the existing provision of IT was inputted and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), while the open-ended questions on needs in relation to the 5 areas were analysed qualitatively.

Results

• *EXISTING PROVISION*

1. ACCESS TO COMPUTERS

65% of guidance counsellors who responded to the questionnaire² had a computer in the school for guidance. 61% use a computer in school for guidance and 48% had training in the use of computers for guidance.

69% use a computer in their work- this figure is slightly higher than the previous percentages for having a computer for guidance, or using a computer for guidance. However there is a difference in the wording of the questions – this question does not stipulate use for guidance. 60% of the respondents have access to a computer located in the guidance room and 58% have access to a computer that is dedicated solely to guidance

Other locations for the computer included: the careers room, the computer room, the career library, the vice-principal's office, the science room and the staff room. In 53% of the schools, students had access to a computer for guidance purposes. The percentage of each class group increases with the seniority of the class – i.e. in 1% of the schools, first years use the computer for guidance, while in 46% of them, 6th years use the computer for guidance.

Table 1.1 Percentage of student year groups using computer for guidance

	% Using Computer for Guidance
1 st year	1%
2 nd year	1%
3 rd year	6%
TYO	19%
5 th year	31%
6 th year	46%

2. TRAINING

54% of the guidance counsellors had received formal training in the use of computers. This training ranged from a brief half hour training session to a more comprehensive ½ day course. I.G.C., G.R.I.T., or Department of Education in-service days provided most training courses. Other respondents gained their computer training through Higher Education, but the majority of these obtained their qualifications some time ago. Just over half the guidance counsellors (51%) described themselves as self-taught. Only 7% of guidance counsellors rated themselves at the advanced level of competency, while 37% rated themselves at the Intermediate level, 40% at Beginner level and 12% said they had no skills (missing = 4%). Therefore over half the guidance counsellors described themselves as having no skills or as beginners.

Whether or not the guidance counsellors reported having training in the use of computers for guidance is related to student access to a computer for guidance - in 63% of the schools where the guidance counsellor has training, students have access to the computer, this figure decreases to 47% where guidance counsellors don't have training in the use of computers for

² All percentages are based on the sample of 353 guidance counsellors who responded to the questionnaire, unless otherwise stated. Therefore, from this point on, the phrase ' % of guidance counsellors' refers to ' % of guidance counsellors who responded to the survey' i.e. % of respondents.

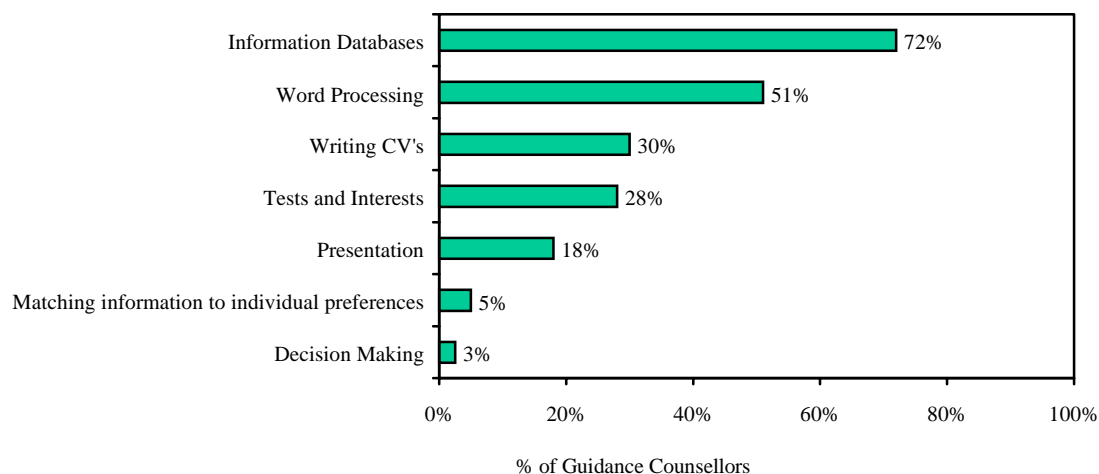
guidance ($\chi^2=7.8$, $df=1$, $p<.01$). This may indicate an increased confidence on the part of the guidance counsellor to allow students access and to show them what to do, if they have received training in the use of computers for guidance.

3. HARDWARE

63% of guidance counsellors had an IBM (PC) type computer, over half of these Pentiums. 3% of guidance counsellors are using an Apple Mac (1% use both, and 33% are missing values/no access to a computer). The vast majority of the guidance counsellors who 'use a computer in their work' use one operating under the Windows Operating System (91%, 70% with Windows '95), while 7% were using a DOS based system, and 2% Mac OS. 31% of guidance counsellors (full sample 353) use a *computer with a modem*, while 38% use a *computer with Internet access*. While these figures may seem to conflict, allowance must be made for the IT knowledge of the Guidance Counsellors responding to the questionnaire. The most popular of the internet-service providers was Ireland-on-line (25% of sample), followed by Indigo at 6%. 55% of the respondents use a computer with a CD-ROM drive.

4. SOFTWARE

Fig. 4.1 Guidance Counsellors Use of Computer Software



The most popular use of computer software is to access information databases (e.g. Qualifax and Gairm). The figure of 72% of the sample again contradicts earlier figures (e.g. 69% of guidance counsellors using a computer at work). There are a few possible reasons for this: Counsellors may be referring to use of computer outside work, perhaps in the home, or this figure may be inflated due to 'respondent fatigue' - where the questionnaire begins to lose the attention of the respondent, who may give contradictory answers. Just over half the respondents use computer software for word processing (51%) and 30% use it for writing CV's with packages such as CV Processor. Less popular are the guidance dedicated packages: aptitude tests and interest questionnaires such as 'Jobscan' and 'My Future' (28%), packages that match information to individual preferences e.g. 'Pathfinder' (5%), and decision making software packages like 'You Decide' (3%). Other software packages mentioned were CD-ROMS from particular universities, CAO applications, and Which University? The guidance software packages used most readily by counsellors were Qualifax, ECCTIS, Which University?, GAIRM and CAO applications. Those used most regularly by students were Qualifax, ECCTIS and GAIRM.

Cross analysis shows that use of the packages is related to whether the guidance counsellor has a computer dedicated to guidance or not, in most cases guidance counsellors are more likely to use packages if they have a dedicated computer e.g. Tests and Interest questionnaire software was used by 39% of those with a *dedicated computer* compared with 22% of those without ($\chi^2=7.48$, $df=1$, $p<.01$); word processing packages were used by 69% of those with a *computer dedicated to guidance*, compared with 51% of those *without a computer dedicated to guidance* ($\chi^2=8.77$, $df=1$, $p<.005$).

Use of software packages is also closely related to the guidance counsellors self rating of competence in the use of computers. For the purpose of analysis, the guidance counsellors have been divided into 2 groups – those who rated themselves as having no skills or as beginners, and those who rated themselves as intermediate or advanced level. Those guidance counsellors in the second group are more likely to use all the software packages with the exception of information databases where there is no difference. Where use of the software package is very low (decision making packages and packages that match information to individual preferences) rating of computer competency bears less relation to usage.

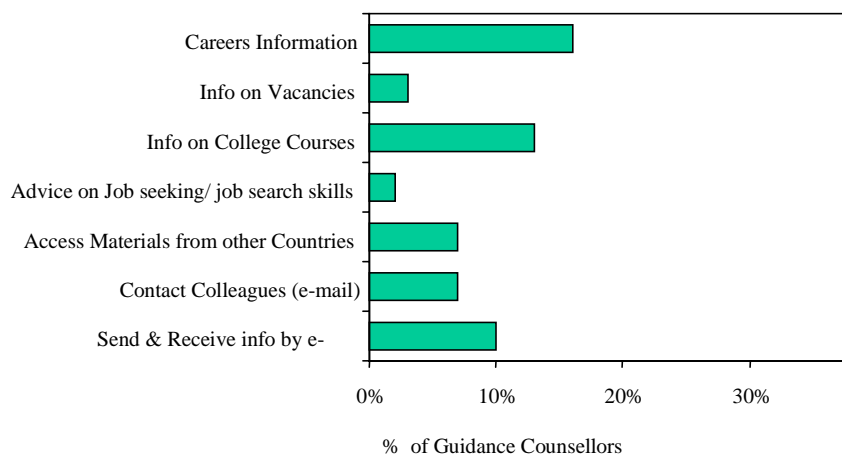
Table 4.1: Difference in Use of Software Packages according to Self-rated Competence Level in the Use of Computers

<i>Packages used:</i>	% of GC's who rated selves as No skills/ Beginner	% of GC's who rated selves as Intermediate/ Advanced
Matching Information to Individual Preferences	5%	6%
Tests and Interests	25%	43%*
Writing CVs	25%	48%*
Decision Making	2%	4%
Word processing	46%	78%*
Presentation	11%	31%*

*The likelihood of such a difference happening by chance is less than 0.5%

Use of the Internet for guidance purposes was quite low in general – the most popular use was to obtain careers information (16% of guidance counsellors), while very few guidance counsellors reported using the internet to either get advice on jobseeking /job search skills (2%) or obtain information on vacancies (3%). Figure 4.2 shows guidance counsellors' use of the Internet. Even when we take into account that only 38% of the sample have access to the internet, less than half this figure are using the internet to obtain careers information (the modal response in this category).

Fig. 4.2: Guidance Counsellors Use of the Internet



5. SUPPORT IN USING IT

The majority of guidance counsellors (64%) depend on the computer teacher in their school for assistance when they encounter IT problems. Smaller groups rely on the software supplier/ developer (13%), the hardware supplier/ developer (11%) or another counsellor (11%).

• ***NEEDS IN RELATION TO ACCESS, TRAINING, HARDWARE, SOFTWARE & SUPPORT***

At the end of each section of the questionnaire, guidance counsellors were given the opportunity to express their particular needs in each area. Not all respondents answered these questions; therefore in this section the answers will be analysed qualitatively by giving examples of the needs expressed.

1. ACCESS

The main concern expressed by guidance counsellors in relation to access to computers is the need for a computer (in the absence of access to one), and specifically one that is dedicated to guidance. This requirement is closely linked to that of student access. Respondents felt that if they had a computer dedicated to guidance, there would be more opportunity for student access. Another issue raised in connection with student access to computers was time – the timetable didn't always allow space for guidance classes in the computer room.

Examples of needs in this area are:

- *'More computers to allow student access independent of the guidance counsellor';*
- *'Hands on use for both self and students in my office';*
- *'Access for students other than during lunch time';*
- The need to have guidance classes timetabled in the computer room, so that a number of students could access guidance material under the supervision of the guidance counsellor.

Counsellors also expressed the need for training *'in the use of what I have'* and *'time to learn how to use it to its maximum benefit'*. Some respondents also stated the need for increased provision of hardware e.g. modems, CD-ROMs, or access to the Internet and e-mail.

2. TRAINING

The main theme of responses to the needs question in this area, was the need for training in software packages particular to guidance, followed by training in the use of the Internet. There was a general sense in these answers that training needs are not being fulfilled. The need for training is supported by the quantitative data where over half the guidance counsellors rated their competency in the use of computers as either having no skills or as beginners.

Counsellors expressed the feeling that they didn't know enough to take full advantage of the facilities they had. Some counsellors used one-word answers such as *'considerable'* or *'huge'* to describe their needs in this area. Other examples include:

- *'More confidence and knowledge in the use of computers'*
- *'A course to enable me to use the guidance software with skill and confidence'*
- *'I have all the latest programmes and equipment (since Sept. '97)... I just need a trainer to bring me through them..'*
- *'I have Gairm etc., I just don't know how to use them'*
- *'Training in the use of the software and in applying this use to a classroom situation'*

Another element of training needs coming through the answers is the need for advice on the purchase of software etc., which packages are superior, what each one provides.

- *'reliable information on software I could use for guidance'*
- *'to find out how the students might avail and benefit from the use of guidance software'*

3. HARDWARE

Most respondents to this question mentioned access to the Internet, modems and CD-ROM drives as their main hardware needs. In relation to Internet access some guidance counsellors expressed the need for an Internet connection exclusively for guidance:

- *'Modem and Internet access with a line provided separate to all existing lines in the school'*
- *'Internet connection with own telephone line'*

Apart from guidance counsellors whose basic need was to have access to a computer in the first place, many guidance counsellors expressed the need for an upgrade in hardware provision.

- *'A decent 'fast' computer with adequate memory space'*
- *'A good computer and printer'*
- *'A more sophisticated machine – not just the left-overs'*
- *'Up-dated model with modem etc.'*
- *'More up-to-date computer capable of providing Internet access and Windows '97'*
- *'A modern PC – windows 95, 8MB with modem for Internet'*

Again as in the training category, the guidance counsellors want to be able to take full advantage of the IT resources available to them, but may not have the knowledge to do so:

- *'To be able to use the computers when necessary. The resources are in the school but e-mail is not used. Few know how to use it'*
- *'To be aware of the appropriate hardware for my needs!'*

4. SOFTWARE

With regard to software needs guidance counsellors listed various software packages for use in guidance such as GAIRM, My Future, Pathfinder, Qualifax etc. Counsellors also mentioned software in relation to guidance packages suitable for student use. Access to up-to-date guidance software seems to be constrained by lack of money in the guidance budget and lack of time to learn to use such packages:

- *'Access to more money to purchase software programmes'*
- *'More resources to purchase software'*
- *'An allocation to purchase relevant software and the time to familiarise myself with the programmes'*

As in the previous areas, the need to understand and use resources more effectively is evident in the software area:

- *'Training in presentation and word processing skills – all computer skills really!!!'*
- *'Prioritise what is available and to learn how to use the same productively'*
- *'Need to find out how to use it correctly'*
- *'Not familiar enough to decide'*
- *'Training days for using software packages. Information on packages available'*
- *'The know-how to use and put the software on the computers'*
- *'Not familiar with what is available'*

Access to the Internet and e-mail was also a general theme running through the 'needs' answers in this area. Again, the frustration of having resources but not being able to use them is coming through in the answers to this question:

- *'Practical information and guidance on using the Internet'*
- *'To know how to access relevant information'*
- *'Understanding how the Internet might be used'*
- *'Someone to show me how to use the Internet'*

5. SUPPORT IN USING IT

In response to the question of needs in relation to support in using IT, the main theme running through the answers again is the need for more training. Guidance counsellors feel that if they had ongoing training they might not have as many problems and not need as much support:

- *'An annual course briefing us on developments in the area of IT in guidance'*
- *'Training in use of guidance software'*
- *'Training and more training'*
- *'Someone or a course to restore my confidence'*
- *'I feel I need to know more about computers and how to use them before I'd feel confident in asking the suppliers/developers for help'*
- *'To develop my general skills'*
- *'More personal competence'*

The need for a more reliable support system in using IT was also expressed:

- *'A source of referral for trouble-shooting'*
- *'A support group to exchange information, ideas and review IT developments'*
- *'Technical support at a reasonable price'*

More specifically, guidance counsellors wanted support from someone who uses computers for guidance themselves with knowledge of the different guidance packages and advice on what is available:

- *'Easy access to somebody familiar with relevant guidance programmes'*
- *'Direct contact with someone who works in guidance and is used to dealing with similar problems'*
- *'Access by phone to an expert'*
- *'A helpline for queries and information on available resources'*

- ***FINAL COMMENT/ OBSERVATION***

Approximately one third of respondents chose to add a final comment /observation at the end of the questionnaire. The responses can be broadly categorised into the sections of the questionnaire – most merely reiterated earlier comments.

Access to the computer room for guidance classes and adequate access to a computer for the use of the guidance counsellor, as issues were stated again. The point was made, if there was adequate provision of IT in general to schools, a computer for guidance use would not be seen by others in the school as such an ‘under-utilisation’ of resources. Others mentioned having to use their PC’s at home for guidance purposes and for access to the Internet.

Lack of proper training in the use of computers for guidance was again the most prevalent issue raised. Some of the guidance counsellors lack even basic training in the use of computers:

- *‘Would like a comprehensive in-service course to overcome gross ignorance of computers’*
- *‘My main problem is that I have tried to work my way through with computers – I feel very inadequate in this area’*

There is a sense of frustration on the part of the guidance counsellors, at not being able to use their IT resources to their full potential. This is particularly evident in regard to software packages developed specifically for guidance:

- *‘I.T. in guidance has excellent possibilities. However, without the proper training, I am unable to utilise this to its best effect. Hands-on training is required’*
- *‘ I have no knowledge of I.T. – I can’t use GAIRM or CD’s – I have both but can’t access them. Where can I get help to give me some confidence? Help please’*
- *‘I see little point in providing money for equipment in this area with no provision for training’*
- *‘I would like to be able to benefit from all the packages available’*

Queries on the logistics of using guidance software in a classroom situation were also raised. One respondent stated that he/she was not familiar enough with the software to use it in the presence of students or in a classroom situation.

In relation to hardware and software, final comments merely repeated the needs expressed in the previous section – upgraded hardware, Internet access, more software specifically for guidance and training in the use of same.

One interesting suggestion in the area of support in the use of I.T. was to have a guidance counsellor who is a computer expert available to give both technical support for hardware and software problems and also advice on guidance materials available and evaluation of same. This could be in the form of a phone helpline.

Conclusions

- Over half the sample of guidance counsellors surveyed have access to a computer that is dedicated to guidance, and over two thirds use a computer in their work. These figures should be treated with caution as they may be somewhat inflated. Due to the considerable IT content of the survey, it is likely that those who did not respond are those who do not have access to a computer (48% response rate).
- 6th year students in 46% of the schools have access to a computer for guidance use. This percentage decreases as the student year groups get more junior (6% of third year groups and 1% of first year groups). The guidance counsellors have expressed the need for a computer that is dedicated to guidance usage, which will in turn provide more access for students. Access to a computer for guidance for junior cycle students is very low, although important decisions regarding subject choice are made in most schools after both first year and again after third or TYO year. Increased provision of computers for guidance may alleviate this problem.
- 54% of guidance counsellors had received some sort of training in the use of computers for guidance purposes – however both the quantity and quality of training is varied. The need for training and lack of knowledge in the use of computers seems to be the main thread through the open-ended questions on needs in relation to IT. Over half the sample described themselves as having no computer skills or as beginners. Counsellors expressed frustration at having the IT resources, yet not having the skills or knowledge to use them to their optimum potential. Training courses in the basic skills needed to use a computer, and also more advanced courses in the use of guidance packages, the internet and using computers in a classroom situation, are needed urgently in order to prevent this wastage of IT resources in schools.
- Level of training in the use of computers is also related to the earlier point of student access. Counsellors have stressed the importance of student access to computers for guidance, yet many feel their own competency in computer use lacking. Students are more likely to have access to computers for guidance, where the guidance counsellor has had training in the use of computers for guidance.
- 63% of the guidance counsellors had an IBM type computer (over half of these Pentiums) and 3% are using Apple Mac. 31% of the respondents have a modem (necessary for Internet access) and 55% of the guidance counsellors have a CD-ROM drive (often necessary for software use). Guidance counsellors who already had access to a computer expressed the need for these additional features in order to use the computer to its full potential.
- The most popular computer software used were information databases such as Qualifax and Gairm. The usage of other guidance packages was disappointing however, with less than one third of the sample using aptitude tests and interest questionnaires such as 'Jobscan', and less than 10% using packages such as 'Pathfinder' and 'You Decide'. Usage of packages for guidance is related both to the competency level of the guidance counsellor and also to whether there is a computer dedicated to guidance or not. The need for training is again evident in the fact that those who rate their computer competency as either intermediate or advanced are more likely to use these packages than those whose competency is at the level of no skills or beginner. The open-ended question revealed lack of adequate budget to purchase software, lack of sufficient time to gain familiarity with it, and again, wastage of IT resources due to lack of training in their proper usage.

- Nearly 40% of the sample have access to the Internet and e-mail. However use of the Internet as a source for guidance materials is disappointingly low. Again, guidance counsellors express a lack of knowledge of how best to use the Internet to source guidance materials. Once more the need for training in this area is clear, along with some sort of directory of useful web sites for accessing guidance information.
- The majority of guidance counsellors are depending on computer teachers for help with IT problems. However, comments reveal the need for some sort of referral service for both the hardware and software needs. Perhaps if training in the use of computers for guidance was given by the location of the schools, guidance counsellors in the one area could form a support network among themselves, to '*exchange information, ideas and review IT developments*'. The urgent need for training in the use of computers for guidance comes through in this area where guidance counsellors are stressing the need for support in the use of the software and advice on what is available to them rather than support for the hardware.
- In general, the comments and observations made by the guidance counsellors indicate a lack of adequate resources, particularly for student access; and where there are resources, a frustratingly low level of the knowledge and know-how to use them.

Recommendations

- Guidance counsellors should be provided with a **computer dedicated to use for guidance**. Such computers need to have the **specifications necessary to use the latest guidance software and to allow internet access** e.g. CD-ROM drive, modem, sufficient memory, access to a phone line. These computers should be compatible with the existing computers in the school to allow other computers on the school network access files/folders for guidance use.
- Schools should be encouraged to promote **student access** to computers for guidance, not only on a one-to-one basis in the guidance room, but also in a classroom situation. School timetables need to allocate classtime in the computer room for guidance use, so that the students can adopt a more 'hands-on' approach to the use of information technology in guidance. Students need access to computers for guidance not only in the senior cycle, but also in the junior cycle when important decisions regarding subject choices are made.
- The need for **training** in the use of IT for guidance should be addressed urgently. Guidance counsellors range from lacking the basic skills of computer usage to lacking the knowledge and support to purchase and use guidance packages. Where guidance counsellors have the necessary hardware and software resources, they lack the knowledge for their optimum usage. Training courses from basic computer skills to advanced use of software and the Internet should be provided on an ongoing basis throughout the year. The survey findings also indicate that improved training provision would improve levels of student access.
- Specifically, guidance counsellors need **information about and training in the use of guidance software and the Internet**. They need to be provided with the knowledge and information to use what resources they have to optimum level. Computer training should also include advice on guidance software and Internet use for guidance materials. In addition to the necessary training to use general and guidance software, guidance counsellors need to be allocated **an adequate budget to purchase up-to-date software**, and the **time** to put training into practice.

- Training courses alone are not sufficient, guidance counsellors should be provided with **support and back-up** in the use of both the hardware and the software, in particular the guidance packages. Guidance counsellors can no longer be expected to rely on some sort of 'ad-hoc' arrangement with another teacher or another counsellor. Perhaps the need for support in the use of IT hardware and software could be incorporated with the provision of up-to-date advice on guidance packages, useful websites etc., in the form of an 'IT & Guidance support line'.

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NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION. (1997) *Guidance in the Information Society: Conference Proceedings*. Dublin: National Centre for Guidance in Education.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROVISION AND USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN GUIDANCE IN POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The purpose of this questionnaire is to assess the existing provision and use of information technology for guidance in post primary schools with a view to developing a proposal to the Department of Education and Science in relation to its IT 2000 Programme.

Even if you do not have or do not use a computer for guidance, it is important that you reply so that the proposal to the Department is as realistic as possible.

Please answer the following before moving to the Questionnaire proper:

I have a computer in school for guidance Yes No

I use a computer in school for guidance Yes No

I have training in the use of computers for guidance Yes No

CONTACT DETAILS

Name of Guidance Counsellor: _____

Name of School: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____ email: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please consider these questions carefully and as fully as possible:

SECTION ONE: ACCESS

1.1 Do you use a computer in your work? Yes No

1.2 Where is the computer located? In the guidance counsellor's room
Located elsewhere

Please specify _____

1.3 Is the computer dedicated to use for guidance? Yes No

1.4 Do your students have access to a computer for guidance purposes? Yes No

If yes, where is the computer located:

In the guidance counsellor's room
Located elsewhere

Please specify _____

1.5 Which student year group(s) use the computer for guidance? 1st TYO
2nd 5th
3rd 6th

1.6 **My needs** in the area of access to a computer for guidance are: _____

SECTION TWO: TRAINING

2.1 Have you received any formal training for using computers? Yes No

If yes, please detail: _____

2.2 Are you self-taught? Yes No

2.3 What level of competency would you rate yourself? No skills Beginner
Intermediate Advanced

Other: _____

2.4 **My needs** in the area of training in the use of IT for guidance are: _____

SECTION THREE: HARDWARE DETAILS

3.1 What kind of computer do you have? Apple Mac IBM (PC)

3.2 What is its specification? i.e. 286 386 486
Pentium Other _____

3.3 How much memory has it? 4 MB 8 MB Other _____

3.4 Which operating system does it use? DOS Windows MAC OS

3.5 If Windows, which version? Windows 3.11 Windows '95

3.6 Does it have a CD ROM drive? Yes No

3.7 Do you have a Modem? Yes No

If yes, please specify speed _____

3.8 Do you have access to a printer? Yes No

3.9 What kind of printer is it? Laser Dot Matrix Black & White Colour

3.10 Where is the printer located? In the guidance counsellor's room
Located elsewhere

Please specify _____

3.11 Do you have Internet access? Yes No

3.12 Which Internet Service Provider do you use? Ireland on Line Indigo

Other _____

3.13 My needs in the area of hardware for guidance are: _____

SECTION FOUR: SOFTWARE DETAILS

4.1 For which purposes do you use software? (tick as many as appropriate)

	Yes	No
Information databases (e.g. QUALIFAX, GAIRM)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Matching information to individual preferences (e.g. PATHFINDER)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tests and Interest (e.g. JOBSCAN, MY FUTURE)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing CVs (e.g. CV PROCESSOR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decision making (e.g. YOU DECIDE)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Word Processing (e.g. WORD, MS WORKS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presentation (e.g. POWERPOINT)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify) _____

4.2 Which guidance software packages do you most regularly use? (name **three**)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4.3 Which guidance software packages do your students most regularly use? (name **three**)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4.4 If you use E-mail, which software package for E-mail does your school use?

Please specify _____

4.5 For which purposes do you use the Internet?

- To obtain careers information
- To obtain information on vacancies
- To obtain information on college courses
- To get advice on job seeking/job search skills
- To access guidance materials from other countries
- To contact colleagues by E-mail
- To send and receive information by E-mail

Other (please specify) _____

4.6 My needs in the area of software for guidance are: _____

SECTION FIVE: SUPPORT IN USING IT

5.1 Whom do you depend on for assistance if you have IT problems? (tick as appropriate)

- The computer teacher
- Another guidance counsellor
- The hardware supplier/developer
- The software supplier/developer

Other (please specify) _____

5.2 My needs in the area of support in using IT in guidance are: _____

FINAL QUESTION

Is there any comment/observation you would like to make about IT in guidance which is not covered by your answers to the questions above?

PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO NCGE, 189 PARNELL STREET, DUBLIN 1, BEFORE JANUARY 9TH 1998.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AND ATTENDING TO THE LEVEL OF DETAIL SOUGHT. *Q:/ncge/reports/gcquest.doc*

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION

ACTION PLAN FOR GUIDANCE

PROPOSAL TO SCHOOLS IT2000

1. Hardware

All guidance counsellors in post-primary schools should be provided with a dedicated computer for guidance with the necessary specifications to use the latest guidance software and to allow Internet access. These specifications should include a 32xCD-ROM drive; a 56kps modem; 16k RAM; DVD-ROM drive and/or capability.

2. Other Equipment

- 2.1 All guidance counsellors in post-primary schools should be provided with a dedicated phone line for Internet access.
- 2.2 All guidance counsellors in post-primary schools should be provided with a colour printer or the means to access existing printer provision.

3. Training

All guidance counsellors in post-primary schools should be provided with appropriate training in (a) computer competency, (b) use of various software packages for guidance, (c) use of the Internet for guidance, (d) network and server issues, and (e) the methodology of using computer room facilities for guidance classes.

4. Software

All guidance counsellors in post-primary schools should be provided with the resources to purchase appropriate software for guidance.

5. Training and Support Materials

All guidance counsellors in post-primary schools should be provided with training and support materials including copies of the following NCGE publications:

“Guidance in the Information Society: Conference Proceedings”, and
“A Review of Computer-Assisted Guidance and the Internet in Europe”.

6. Systems Support

- 6.1 Project money should be set aside for (a) the development of appropriate software for guidance in Ireland, (b) the enhancement of existing software e.g. QUALIFAX, (c) the adaptation of existing software from the UK and other countries.
- 6.2 Project money should be set aside for training computer managers in schools in the appreciation of practical uses of computer room facilities for guidance classes
- 6.3 Project money should be set aside for the funding of a one year post at NCTE or NCGE; the objective of such a post is to act as both pro-active support and help-line during the transition period.