



Department of Education and Skills

Response to: Research on the Practice of Counselling by Guidance Counsellors in Post Primary Schools

Department Statement

The Department of Education and Skills welcomes the report, commissioned by NCGE, on *Research on the Practice of Counselling by Guidance Counsellors in Post Primary Schools*. The Department wishes to thank the researchers Professor Mark Morgan and Dr Claire Hayes for their work. The Department also recognises the key contribution of the Research Steering Group, those guidance counsellors and stakeholders who participated in this research and the professional commitment of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools to the counselling aspect of their work.

The following statement is issued in response to the Recommendations of the Research Report.

The Department of Education and Skills wishes to clarify that, referring to and according to the definitions of guidance counselling below, guidance counsellors are qualified to provide counselling support to students. The counselling aspect of the guidance programme should be delivered within the context of the whole school guidance plan and policies therein, where the guidance counsellor is working within the boundaries of their professional competence, and attends supervision as appropriate.

In clarifying the counselling role of the guidance counsellor within the post primary schools system, the Department is informed by the Education Act 1998¹, Department guidelines 2005², Department circulars, the National Guidance Forum Report *Guidance for Life: An Integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland* 2007³ and other policies relating to post primary schools. These include the NCGE publication *Planning the Whole School*

¹ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/pdf/1998/en.act.1998.0051.pdf> Education Act 1998

² http://www.sdpi.ie/inspectorate/pp_guideliines_second_level_schools_9c%20Appropriate%20Guidance.pdf

³ http://www.nationalguidanceforum.ie/documents/NGF_Guidance_for_Life%20final.pdf

*Guidance Programme*⁴, the Social Personal and Health Education curriculum, Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools (Circular 0065/2011), Department of Children and Youth Affairs report *Children First: National Guidance 2011*⁵, the NEPS Continuum of Support model⁶ and the *Counselling Competencies for Guidance Counselling Education Programmes: Interim Guidelines*⁷ of the Committee of Directors of Studies in Guidance Counselling.

This document also clarifies the role of the NCGE in relation to the counselling aspect of the guidance counselling role.

Policy and Definition

The Education Act 1998 section 9(c) states that a school shall use its resources to (c) *ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.*

Guidance in schools refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self- management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance. (pg. 4 Department guidelines, 2005)

In 2005 the Department in its report *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance*⁸ clarified that

“the practice of counselling within guidance counselling in post primary schools is a key part of the school guidance programme, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis.”

In 2004, NCGE stated that guidance counsellors are professionally trained to undertake various tasks under the guidance programme including: *“Counselling: empowering students to make decisions, solve problems, change behaviours and resolve issues in their lives.”*⁹

⁴ http://www.ncge.ie/reports/PI_Sch_Gui_prog_leaf.pdf

⁵ http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobervlet/cl0065_2011.pdf?language=EN and http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/child_welfare_protection/ChildrenFirst.pdf (Section 4.8 Roles and responsibilities of Schools)

⁶ http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobervlet/neps_post_primary_continuum_teacher_guide.pdf?language=EN

⁷ *Counselling Competencies for Guidance Counselling Education Programmes: Interim Guidelines CDCSG 2011.* (available on request from NCGE)

⁸ http://www.sdpi.ie/inspectorate/pp_guideliines_second_level_schools_9c%20Appropriate%20Guidance.pdf

⁹ http://www.ncge.ie/reports/PI_Sch_Gui_prog_leaf.pdf

Under the 1998 Education Act, schools are required to prepare a school plan. Schools are encouraged to develop a comprehensive guidance plan as part of their overall school development plan, taking into account the needs of the students, available resources and contextual factors. DES Guidelines (2005)¹⁰ outline guidance as a whole school activity involving an appropriately qualified staff guidance counsellor (i.e. post graduate qualification in guidance) in the first instance, as well as the other relevant members of management and staff in the school.

The whole school guidance plan provides for the clarification of roles within the school guidance programme and the provision of appropriate guidance to all students. Successful guidance planning requires the involvement of school principals and other school staff such as year heads, Transition Year co-ordinators, SPHE teachers, subject teachers, school pastoral care team etc. NCGE *Planning the School Guidance Programme*, section 4.2.1, states that within the overall time allocated for guidance, adequate time should be given for the counselling function. The rationale for the time allocated and its usage should be evident in the school guidance plan.

The Role of Counselling within Guidance Counselling

The role of counselling within guidance counselling has been clarified in the National Guidance Forum Competency framework produced by the National Guidance Forum in 2007. The Forum consisted of guidance representatives and stakeholders¹¹. This Competency document identifies five main areas of competency for guidance practitioners:

- Theory and practice of vocational educational and personal/social guidance across the lifespan
- Labour market education and training
- Counselling
- Information and resource management
- Professional practice

Those practitioners who are identified as “*guidance counsellors*” will *demonstrate the ability to apply counselling theory and skills in one-to-one and group settings.*

This competency framework defines counselling competency as the

“capacity to use appropriate counselling skills. The guidance counsellor will be able to engage in personal counselling with individuals around issues such as stress,

¹⁰ http://www.sdpi.ie/inspectorate/pp_guidelines_second_level_schools_9c%20Appropriate%20Guidance.pdf

¹¹ http://www.nationalguidanceforum.ie/documents/NGF_Competency_Report%20Final.pdf

transitional difficulties, relationship issues, personal/sexual identity, group culture pressures, health issues and bereavement.”

The recently published CDSGC Counselling Competencies for Guidance Counselling Education Programmes: Interim Guidelines¹² adopts a definition of counselling in the context of guidance: *“In counselling, the guidance practitioner gives professional support to help those experiencing personal difficulties and to promote their personal growth and well-being.”*

Counselling Referral and Professional Practice

DES recommended in 2005¹³ that in cases where students require personal counselling over a protracted period of time, guidance counsellors should refer such cases to relevant outside agencies. The NGF Competency framework supports this recommendation and provides examples.

“In cases where the degree of disturbance to the mental well-being of the individual is significant, the guidance counsellor will be able to make appropriate referrals to specialised professionals. This includes for example, cases where individuals disclose issues such as suicide ideation, addiction, self-harm, sexual abuse and eating disorders.”

Membership of a professional association is an important support for the majority of those in professional practice and is encouraged by the Department. Adhering to professional ethics supports the guidance counsellor to remain aware of his/her own level of professional competence and to employ referral in the case of acting outside his/her competence. Furthermore, adherence to the code of ethics of professional associations provides assurance that the highest standards of professional practice are core values of the members of that profession.

The Committee of Directors of Studies in Guidance Counselling (CDSGC) outline the professional responsibility of the guidance counsellor to engage with on-going supervision; to demonstrate knowledge of the professional standards, policies and practices which govern practice in their work setting; recognise their own personal and professional limitations and act appropriately to seek supervision or professional support; be aware when it is appropriate to refer to more specialised professionals and do so when for example suicidal thinking, self-harm, sexual abuse, eating disorders, addiction.

The National Guidance Forum Competency Framework refers to the requirement for guidance counsellors to *“engage in on-going continuing professional development to improve*

¹² Counselling Competencies for Guidance Counselling Education Programmes: Interim Guidelines CDCSG 2011. (available on request from NCGE)

¹³ http://www.sdpi.ie/inspectorate/pp_guideliines_second_level_schools_9c%20Appropriate%20Guidance.pdf

his/her skills and to engage in supervision as appropriate.”¹⁴ The CDSGC Counselling Competencies for Guidance Counselling Education Programmes: Interim Guidelines highlight that *“developing competence in counselling is a lifelong task, requiring on-going commitment to the process of personal and professional development”*

Guidance Counselling Supervision and CPD Supports

The Department recognises the need to support professional practice in guidance counselling as above and funds the supervision of guidance counselling through Monaghan Education Centre. The collaboration of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) in the management and delivery of the scheme through its branch network is acknowledged by the Department to be a major factor in its success.

NCGE provides a HETAC accredited continuing professional development programme for guidance counsellors on Whole School Guidance Planning. This programme supports guidance counsellors to review the guidance needs of the students and develop the guidance plan to address these needs with the support of school management. This programme also provides principals with the opportunity to be briefed on and discuss the role of school management and staff, and other stakeholders in the guidance programme and the planning process, as envisaged by the 1998 Education Act.

The NCGE Whole School Guidance Planning programme, and out-of-school time spent attending guidance supervision sessions are recognised by the Department of Education and Skills as eligible to be considered as whole school guidance planning/nationally mandated Continuing Professional Development programmes for purposes of Circular 0025/2011 under the Croke Park Agreement. Within this category, it remains a function for school management to prioritise its needs and the use of Croke Park hours in respect of participation in programmes outside of school.

Guidance Counselling and SPHE

Since guidance is a whole school responsibility and SPHE is an integral part of the school’s provision of personal and social education and a compulsory programme at Junior Cycle, the Department of Education and Skills recognises that an overlap exists between SPHE and Guidance (see page 9 of *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance.*)

Department guidelines on Junior Cycle SPHE states that the

“planned communication and co-operation between those involved in SPHE and the guidance personnel in school will be essential for the effectiveness of both SPHE and guidance in the school.”

¹⁴ http://www.nationalguidanceforum.ie/documents/NGF_Competency_Report%20Final.pdf

Consequently, the Department supports the involvement of guidance counsellors in the *planning* of SPHE and in the delivery of those aspects of the programme that appropriately belong to the whole school guidance plan. Adopting a modular approach to the delivery of SPHE is recommended as one way in which the aspects of Guidance and SPHE that overlap can be successfully delivered to students. Team teaching can also work well. However, delivery of the full SPHE programme to any class group by the guidance counsellor is neither desirable nor appropriate.

Role of NCGE

The National Centre for Guidance in Education is an agency of the Department, whose role includes promoting the implementation of best practice in guidance and counselling in schools, centres for education, and adult education settings in accordance with the requirements of the Education Act 1998; advising on policy and strategies for the promotion of a continuum of guidance in the context of lifelong learning; providing advice, support, materials and resources for guidance and counselling in education; advising on high quality and relevant initial guidance counselling education and training and providing Continuing professional development (CPD) for guidance practitioners

In line with this remit, the Department will request NCGE to carry out the various recommendations below in their continued support for the role of guidance counselling within the post-primary schools sector.

Department response to Recommendations

1. **Recommendation 1: Role** This statement clarifies the role of counselling in guidance counselling within the post-primary school setting
2. **Recommendation 2: Referral** The Department will request that NCGE will convene a working group, on behalf of the Department to address the following within the context of the Whole School Guidance Plan:

Polices and procedure guidelines for issues relating to counselling within guidance counselling

Written policy on the counselling role

Confidentiality

Referral

Psychometric Assessment

Record keeping and co-ordination of the SPHE and the Guidance programme within the whole school guidance plan.

3. NCGE will liaise with NEPS and HSE where appropriate in line with the proposed Mental Health framework and suicide prevention strategy and the NEPS Continuum of Support model for schools
4. **Recommendations 3 and 4 Support and Training** The Department will appoint NCGE to the National Steering Committee for the Supervision of Guidance Counsellors. NCGE will collaborate with Monaghan Education Centre and IGC to collate information on key themes and issues arising in counselling within guidance counselling. As far as the ratio of students to guidance counsellors is concerned, the Government is committed to sustained and cumulative reductions in public expenditure til at least 2015. In that context, a reduction in the ratio is not possible.
5. NCGE will review the collated information on key themes and issues arising in counselling within guidance counselling from the Supervision groups, with a view to making proposals to the Department on a CPD programme to support good practice in counselling in the provision of guidance counselling
6. **Recommendation 5: Policy** Redevelopment of the NCGE Guidance Counsellors Handbook will incorporate the guidelines/policies and procedures listed above. The content contained as part of the redevelopment of the GCH will take account of the need to develop guidelines/policies and procedures for critical areas such as written policy on counselling role within the school and co-ordination with SPHE within the whole school guidance plan.
7. NCGE will continue to convene the Committee of the Directors of Studies of Guidance Counselling on behalf of the Department, to support their on-going collaboration in the development of post-graduate initial education of guidance counsellors
8. Regarding the provision of Continuing Professional Development, NCGE will liaise with the relevant stakeholders to develop a proposal for a CPD module on *advanced counselling skills*. This proposal will be considered by the Department's Teacher Education Section for funding, and if agreed, tenders for the programme will be sought. The NCGE will advise on needs in this area.
9. **Recommendation 6: Evaluation** The Department will consider its evaluation processes and will liaise with the Inspectorate, NCGE and the working group to consider how processes which pertain to counselling may be evaluated as a component of guidance provision, while respecting the confidentiality of clients. It is practice to consult students and parents when evaluations are being undertaken.

3rd February 2012