

Review
of
Guidance
in
Second Level Schools



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | AND SCIENCE

INSPECTORATE

September 2006

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Acknowledgements

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science wishes to thank Eileen Fitzpatrick, Acting Director of the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) along with Linda Darbey and Deirdre Teeling for their work on Strand 1 and Strand 4 of the review, Selena McCoy and her team at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) who completed Strands 2 and 3 and Deirdre O Neill, Education Department, University of Dublin, Trinity College, who facilitated and reported on the focus group interviews for Strand 4.

The Inspectorate is most grateful to all the stakeholders who responded to the surveys and/or participated in the individual and focus group interviews. Particular thanks are extended to the principals, guidance counsellors, students and parents who gave generously of their time to communicate their views and experiences.

The researchers noted, and greatly appreciated, the high level of co-operation they received from all those with whom they worked across all strands of the review. This, combined with the commitment to detail and thoroughness shown by the researchers themselves, has contributed enormously to the quality and the comprehensiveness of this review.

Finally, the offer of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) to include their survey *Professional Profile 2003/2004* as an appendix to this report on the review is acknowledged. The data from this survey complement the findings of the review and will be of interest to the reader of this report. The co-operation of the IGC is greatly appreciated.

July 2006

Acronyms

CAO	Central Applications Office
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Science
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FES	Free Education Scheme
GEI	Guidance Enhancement Initiative
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
JC	Junior Certificate
JLO	Junior Liaison Officer
LC	Leaving Certificate
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
TY	Transition Year
TYP	Transition Year Programme
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

Preface

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 guidance¹.

This report is based on the findings from the four strands of a “top to bottom” review of guidance in second level schools in Ireland, carried out between the autumn of 2003 and the spring of 2005. The first chapter outlines the background to the review. An executive summary culminating in a list of the overall findings is provided in the second chapter. Then, there is a stand-alone chapter on each of the strands, prepared by the researchers who carried out the study for the strand. The next chapter is a commentary prepared by the Inspectorate and the final chapter identifies a set of issues for further consideration in relation to improving the quality of the guidance service in second level schools.

The four strands of the review were as follows:

- Strand 1:** a quantitative and qualitative survey of the use of the resources provided by the DES for guidance, carried out by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) in all second level schools (738)
- Strand 2:** a more in-depth survey in 260 of the 738 schools, carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)
- Strand 3:** in-depth case studies involving principals, deputy principals, guidance counsellors and students in 15 schools selected from those surveyed in Strand 2, conducted by the ESRI

¹ Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students’ access to appropriate guidance – Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science, 2005

Strand 4: focus group interviews with a range of stakeholders including parents and students conducted in education centres by Dr Deirdre O’Neill, Education Department, University of Dublin, Trinity College and co-ordinated by the NCGE

Appendix 1 contains data from a survey carried out in 2003/04 by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) on the profile of its members and the range of activities carried out by them in the course of their work. *Professional Profile 2003/2004* is based on survey responses received from 93% of the membership of the IGC. The results of this survey may be helpful in interpreting the findings of the four strands of the review.

Chapter 1

Background to the Review and the Policy Context for Guidance in Second Level Schools

Background to Review

In March 2003, the Minister for Education and Science announced the first comprehensive review of the guidance service in second level schools since its inception in the mid 1960s. The review was planned and co-ordinated by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES). This report summarises the findings and outcomes of the review and addresses:

- how the ex-quota allocation of hours for guidance is being used in schools
- how the expertise of guidance counsellors is being used in schools
- the nature of the guidance programmes being implemented in schools and the beneficiaries of these programmes.

The review commenced in the autumn of 2003 and was completed in the spring of 2005.

Allocation to Second Level Schools for Guidance

The Department of Education and Science (DES) allocates guidance resources to schools. At the time of the review (autumn 2003 - spring 2005), all second level schools in the Free Education Scheme (FES), along with those who receive a block grant, were allocated a minimum of 8 ex-quota hours per week for guidance increasing to a maximum of 44 hours based on student enrolment¹ (see Appendix 2 for the schedule of hours that pertained at that time).

¹ In June 2005, a Circular Letter (No PPT 12/05) – *Guidance Provision in Second Level Schools* – was issued to the managerial authorities of secondary, community and comprehensive schools. This Circular provided for an increase in the ex-quota hours allocated by the DES to schools in the Free Education Scheme/Block Grant Scheme (see appendix 3) from the beginning of the 2005/6 school year.

In 2001, a new three year initiative, the **Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI)**, was introduced to build on existing provision of guidance in schools. Under this initiative, the equivalent of 50 additional full-time posts for guidance was allocated to second level schools. Schools were invited to apply for inclusion in the GEI by submitting proposals on how they would address one, or more, of the following:

- developing and promoting links between schools and industry, local agencies and the community
- increasing the uptake of science subjects in senior cycle
- increasing retention rates/ combating early school leaving.

Following a selection process, one hundred and three (103) schools received an additional allocation for guidance under the initiative. Successful schools were requested to submit a detailed plan of how they intended to staff, timetable, deliver and monitor this extra provision. In 2004, the initiative was extended for a further two years. It was also expanded by the provision of the equivalent of an additional 30 full-time guidance posts. These posts were allocated to schools using the same criteria and selection procedures as in the first phase. An additional seventy eight (78) schools benefited from the extension of the initiative.

Guidance within the DES

Following the establishment of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) in 1999, the inspection of guidance, which heretofore had been part of the remit of the Psychological Service within the DES, became a function of the Inspectorate. Since 2001, guidance has been inspected in the same manner as all other subject areas in second level schools. Between September 2001 and June 2005, 131 guidance inspections were carried out by the guidance inspectors. As part of the inspection process, the inspectors provide support to guidance counsellors, particularly in the area of school guidance planning.

Policy Context

The Education Act 1998 section 9 (c) states that a school *shall use its available resources to ...*

(c) ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2000-2006¹ states that *the provision of guidance and counselling in second level schools is vital to enable each pupil to gain the maximum benefit from the education system*. The NDP also identifies the school guidance service as a social inclusion measure within the education sector.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published a report in 2004 on the comparative review of national policies for career information, guidance and counselling services it carried out in 14 OECD countries, including Ireland². The OECD considers guidance within education systems as having an important role to play in laying the foundations for lifelong career development, including *knowledge and competencies regarding self-awareness, the world of work, and making decisions and transitions*³. It defines guidance services as *services that assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers*⁴. It stresses that effective advice and guidance on educational and training options and on links between these options and later occupational destinations *can help better match individuals' learning choices to their interests, talents and intended destinations*⁵. In the OECD's view, this can help to reduce early school leaving, improve flows between different levels of education and improve transitions from education to the labour market—*these outcomes help to make better use of educational resources, and to increase both individual and social returns to investments in education*⁶.

¹ Ireland – National Development Plan 2000-2006 – *Stationery Office: Dublin, 2000, p.99*

² *Career Guidance and Public Policy: Bridging the Gap – OECD: Paris, 2004*

³ *Why Careers information, Guidance and Counselling Matter for Public Policy, A Working Paper OECD: Paris, 2002*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

The OECD also issued a Country Note on Ireland in 2002¹. This provides an overview of guidance services in Ireland, the findings of the reviewers and their recommendations for the development of services in the future. The Country Note makes the following observations in relation to guidance provision in second level schools:

- the imbalance in the guidance service provided in schools in favour of senior cycle students is very hard to justify
- there is a need to put in place a stronger developmental approach to career assistance, to give students skills in career decision-making, to improve their knowledge of the world of work, and to better prepare them for upper secondary subject choice; this would reduce pressures upon guidance counsellors to provide career assistance in a one-to-one mode in senior cycle and give them increased time to focus on students who have the greatest needs
- there is an absence of a formal guidance planning requirement for schools
- there are constraints on guidance counsellors' time arising from:
 - a role that combines subject teaching with guidance
 - a role that combines personal and social guidance with careers guidance
 - existing student to guidance counsellor ratios
- there is weak integration of careers guidance into the curriculum and into the day-to-day work of subject teachers
- there is limited use of experience-based approaches, of ICT and of community-based resources to complement the available guidance counsellor resources.

The European Union Presidency Conclusions² on the importance of guidance throughout life in supporting and furthering the Lisbon Agenda³ emphasise the importance of all European citizens having access to appropriate guidance services at school and at all later life stages. The need for particular attention to be paid to early

¹ OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies, Ireland Country Note, 2002

² EU Presidency Conclusions following an informal meeting of the European Ministers for Education and the Commission of the European Union, April 2004, Dublin.

³ Lisbon Agenda – Strategy agreed by the EU Heads of States and Governments to make the European Union *the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010* – Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon European Council: March 2000

intervention with individuals and groups at risk of not completing their schooling and of alienation from society is also stressed as well as the need for provision for persons with special educational needs.

In May 2004, a Resolution was adopted by the Council of Ministers of the European Union on *Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe*. The Resolution highlights the need for guidance provision within the education system, especially in schools. It states that guidance has *an essential role to play in ensuring that individuals' educational and career decisions are firmly based, and in assisting them to develop effective self-management of their learning and career paths*. The Resolution stresses the role of guidance services in:

- the prevention of early school leaving
- the empowerment of individuals to manage their own learning and careers
- the re-integration of early school leavers into appropriate education and training programmes.

Chapter 2

Executive Summary

The quantitative information for the review was provided mainly by principals, who responded to a questionnaire. This was prepared by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and circulated by the Department of Education and Science (DES) to all second levels schools in the autumn of 2003. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to principals and guidance counsellors, or teachers with guidance hours, in 260 schools by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

The qualitative responses were provided by principals, deputy principals, guidance counsellors, teachers who were engaged in guidance activities, students and other stakeholders. The latter category included parents, past students, representatives from third level institutions, FÁS, primary teachers, representatives from industry and local communities.

For the purpose of this summary, the responses and findings from the strands of the review have been collated into the following:

- principals' and deputy principals' responses and perspectives
- guidance counsellors' and teachers' responses and perspectives
- students' perspectives in case-study schools
- findings from focus group interviews which were held in out-of-school locations around the country.

Principals' and Deputy Principals' Responses and Perspectives

Sixteen percent (16%) of school principals in the Free Education Scheme (FES) reported to have an allocation of hours for guidance (from the DES) which was less than the amount they were entitled to according to their enrolment under Schedule A (see Appendix 2). When analysed according to school type, 11% of all secondary schools, 25% of all vocational schools and 15% of all community and comprehensive schools reported that their allocation was less than their entitlement under the schedule. Overall, 10% of respondents reported that their allocation was greater than their entitlement.

When principals were asked the number of hours actually allocated to guidance in their schools, 11% reported that they allocate less than the ex-quota hours received from the DES for the school concerned. When broken down by school type, this involved 7% of secondary schools, 20% of vocational schools and 4% of community and comprehensive schools.

Of principals in FES schools, 29% reported providing additional hours for guidance from within the general teacher allocation and 10% reported providing additional hours from external sources.

Over 90% of principals reported that the guidance counsellor had his/her own office and had a computer and internet access.

It was reported that most of the time available for guidance was spent with senior cycle students, except in schools that had additional guidance hours provided under the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI).

Of the schools that reported having no allocation under the GEI, 59% reported spending over 70% of time with senior cycle students. In comparison, only 29% of respondents with GEI hours reported spending over 70% of time with senior cycle students.

The main guidance activities carried out with junior cycle students were:

- the provision of educational development programmes¹
- academic guidance²
- one-to-one personal counselling.

The main guidance activities carried out with senior cycle students were:

- careers and educational guidance and information
- provision of educational development programmes
- one-to-one personal counselling.

The main focus of guidance in senior cycle was on entry to third level and on the Central Applications Office (CAO) application processes.

¹ Educational development programmes focus on students' personal and social development, self awareness, decision-making and planning skills

² Academic guidance involves advising students on educational or academic issues such as subject choice, subject level decisions and selection of Leaving Certificate programme.

A majority of schools (over 60%) had no written guidance plan but schools in the GEI were considerably more likely to have such a plan. Having a written guidance plan was found to be associated with higher satisfaction levels among principals with the support structures in their school.

The main strengths of the guidance programmes in schools were considered by the principals and deputy principals to be:

- the personal qualities of the guidance counsellor/s
- the extra time given by guidance counsellors
- the availability of individual one-to-one counselling.

Principals paid tribute to the personal qualities of guidance counsellors. References were made to their accessibility, flexibility, availability, commitment and approachability. They also acknowledged the value of the extra hours worked by guidance counsellors over and above the time allocated to the school for guidance.

Counselling, and in particular individual one-to-one counselling, was seen above all else by principals as one of the major strengths of the guidance programme. The focus on the individual was valued. Senior cycle students, in general, were reported to receive most of the one-to-one attention.

A majority of principals expressed a need for more time and resources for guidance. They were forceful in their concerns and comments in relation to the lack of resources. The most important provision that they wanted to see in place in their school was that of more guidance hours or an improved guidance counsellor to student ratio.

Principals were generally satisfied with the support structures (i.e. pastoral care programmes¹) made available to students in their schools. Schools in designated disadvantaged areas reported greater satisfaction with the support structures in their schools than those in non-designated disadvantaged schools, as did schools in the GEI and in single sex girls' secondary schools. Principals in vocational schools voiced the least satisfaction with their present support structures.

¹ A system to support students, usually comprising tutor/year head and guidance counsellor/chaplain supports.

A majority of principals was satisfied or very satisfied with the following aspects of the guidance programme in their school:

- academic, vocational and career guidance (over 85%)
- personal/social guidance and counselling (67%)
- the input of guidance into pastoral care (65%)

Schools in the GEI were on average more satisfied with the personal/social guidance and counselling and the input into pastoral care. However, a majority overall (65%) felt that some students were missing out on guidance and counselling that they needed.

Schools with an additional allocation under the GEI reported that the difference that this allocation made to the guidance provision was substantial, the reason being that it allowed for the implementation of targeted guidance interventions with both junior and senior students.

While schools were providing guidance for minority groups such as those from the Traveller community or non-national students, there was little evidence that the guidance needs of these students were given priority.

Guidance Counsellors' Responses and Perspectives

Guidance counsellors reported that the two main groups they worked with were Leaving Certificate classes (final year) and Junior Certificate (3rd year) classes. In terms of the proportion of time spent with the different groupings of students, they reported that it was divided as follows:

- 45% with Leaving Certificate (LC) (established) students
- 12% with Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) students
- 8% with Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students
- 10% with Transition Year (TY) students
- 10% with Junior Certificate (JC) students
- 6% with first years
- 4% with Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) students
- 1% with adult classes
- 2% with other student groups.

While a majority of guidance counsellors was satisfied (90%) with the vocational, career and academic guidance provided to students in their school, they were not as satisfied with the personal/social support and counselling being offered. However, those in schools in designated disadvantaged areas and in GEI schools were more satisfied with the personal guidance offered.

A majority of guidance counsellors (63%) was satisfied or very satisfied with the support structures provided for students in their school. Those in GEI schools tended to be most satisfied with the support systems for students in their school while those in single sex boys' secondary schools were the least satisfied.

A majority of schools had established contacts with support services such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), the Garda Síochána, Junior Liaison Officer Service (JLO), social workers and other support agencies. However, dissatisfaction was expressed with the level of support received from some of the services and particularly, with the delay in accessing them.

Three-quarters of guidance counsellors were engaged in teaching, with a third spending more than 12 hours per week on subject teaching. Excluding guidance classes, 60% of guidance counsellors had some subject teaching as part of their workload. Guidance counsellors in GEI schools were less likely to have teaching commitments while those in smaller schools had the greatest number of teaching hours. The majority of guidance counsellors who had teaching hours found it difficult to balance time between teaching and guidance commitments.

Eighty percent (80%) of guidance counsellors, whether teaching or not, reported that their current time allocation was not sufficient for their guidance-related activities and that they had to use non-guidance time for some tasks. Almost all respondents expressed the need for additional resources for guidance and counselling, a greater focus on junior cycle and greater provision of counselling/personal support for students.

Approximately two thirds of guidance counsellors were female. Over a third (34%) qualified twenty years, or more, before the research took place. Of those delivering

guidance as the main provider in their schools, 18% indicated that they did not have a guidance qualification obtained either in Ireland or abroad.

Students' Perspectives

Group interviews were held with both Junior and Leaving Certificate students in the 15 case-study schools which formed Strand 3 of the review.

Students were fairly evenly divided between those who expressed satisfaction with existing provision and those who were generally dissatisfied. Students who were satisfied with existing provision stressed the value of career-related activities and the approachability of the guidance counsellor. Those who expressed dissatisfaction referred to the lack of time spent on guidance and the difficulty in securing individual appointments with the guidance counsellor. Others expressed dissatisfaction with the information they had received when making subject choices, mainly because they later found they had not chosen the subjects they needed for the third-level courses they then wished to take.

A number of students were dissatisfied with the information they had received on available courses and careers. These students felt that guidance focused on a relatively narrow range of courses and career options, drawing mainly on what is offered through the CAO system.

Suggestions from students for the future development of guidance provision focused on:

- more time being allocated to guidance
- more information on a wider range of courses¹ and career options
- the need for guidance at an earlier stage, particularly in the area of subject choice for senior cycle.

Focus Group Interviews

The variation in school guidance provision was a major issue that emerged throughout the focus group meetings. Participants described very different

¹ The Qualifax website which is funded by the DES, provides up-to-date information on every course (third level, further education, adult courses) in the 32 counties of Ireland. The website address is www.qualifax.ie

experiences of guidance services across a range of variables e.g. the extent and the timing of service availability, the service focus and activities involved. The variation occurred across schools of all types and even within schools. Students in the same schools often had different degrees of access to guidance and different experiences of the guidance service. They highlighted the need for structured guidance programmes which would include a programme set out for each year from first year onwards that would be available to all students.

Almost all students, present and past, reported that their experience of guidance services had been concentrated in their final year of school. Students and parents reported that CAO-related information and the CAO application process dominated students' time with guidance counsellors, regardless of whether they met the counsellor as a group or class. A number of students raised the issue of guidance counsellor bias towards traditional courses in the CAO system, claiming that there was little information provided on alternative courses and on trade apprenticeship training.

The need for guidance at an earlier stage in second level education was highlighted by all the groups. Areas identified for guidance input were:

- the transition from primary to second level
- assisting students with subject choice in junior cycle
- assisting students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses
- assisting students in developing personal and life skills.

Participants referred to the strong focus on the LC examinations and CAO 'points', stressing that other important areas get squeezed out as a result. It was suggested by a number of participants that one consequence of the points system has been the devaluing of non-examination activities, including guidance. It was considered by some participants that for many students, teachers and parents, anything seen as "extra" such as guidance classes, tended not to be taken seriously. Some of the students considered guidance classes as a "doss" or a waste of time because there was no examination involved.

The issue of the multiple roles performed by the guidance counsellor was raised in all discussions. The consequences for students by way of limited access to guidance

services were highlighted. Many students pointed to difficulties for them arising from the same person acting as a subject teacher and as a counsellor. They saw the two roles as conflicting with each other. There was consensus that guidance counsellors were over-stretched and under-resourced. All participants strongly and repeatedly advocated the need for post-primary students to have access to one-to-one personal counselling. However, there were mixed views about how the service should be structured, who should provide it and where it should be delivered.

Parents expressed a desire to be more involved in their children's career guidance and for this involvement to occur sooner in the students' school experience. They expressed a desire to become better informed about issues such as subject choice, programme options in the senior cycle and career options in order to be in a position to help their children.

A key issue identified by parents was their anxiety that they or their children might not have all the relevant information about career options. Concerns were expressed about whether or not second level students were able or interested enough to appreciate the implications of their decisions. Parents indicated their (the parents) need to get a sense of the factors influencing their children's decisions, ranging from early subject choices to career choices.

Most parents who had met guidance counsellors face-to-face were positive about such meetings. Many, however, reported that they were unsure about how to approach the guidance counsellor. Others were concerned about how their approach might be perceived by school personnel or by their own children.

Summary of the Main Findings

- School principals emphasised the dedication, commitment, flexibility, accessibility and approachability of guidance counsellors. They paid tribute to the extra hours worked by guidance counsellors and to their willingness to work outside of the time allocated to the school for guidance to provide for the needs of students.
- In the Free Education Scheme, 16% principals of second level schools under-reported the ex-quota allocation for guidance that their schools receive from the DES. This suggests that these principals were not aware of their entitlement.
- When principals of schools in the Free Education Scheme were asked the number of hours actually allocated to guidance in their schools, 11% responded that they allocated less than the ex-quota allocation which the school would have received from the DES based on its enrolment. This was the case for 20% of vocational schools. This suggests that the resources allocated for guidance are not being fully deployed for guidance in these schools.
- In the Free Education Scheme, 29% of principals reported that additional hours for guidance were provided from within the general teacher allocation for their schools.
- Over 90% of principals reported that the guidance counsellor had his/her own office and had a computer and internet access.
- A majority of schools (over 60%) had no written guidance plan, but schools in the GEI were more likely to have such a plan.
- It was reported by principals and guidance counsellors that most of the time available for guidance was spent with senior cycle students, except in schools that had additional hours provided under the GEI.
- Support in schools was heavily concentrated on providing advice on subject choices and assisting students in senior cycle to choose suitable third level education options within the CAO system.
- Counselling, and in particular individual one-to-one counselling, was seen above all else by principals as one of the major strengths of the guidance programme. The focus on the individual was valued. Senior cycle students, in general, were

reported to receive most of this one-to-one attention, particularly in the careers area.

- Students and parents reported that little information or support was being provided for those who wished to pursue less traditional education or career routes. The needs of those who intended to enter employment directly or who required assistance to access FÁS trade apprenticeship or other training opportunities were referred to in this regard.
- A majority of principals was satisfied with the following aspects of the guidance programme: academic, vocational and career guidance (over 85%), personal/social guidance and counselling (67%) and the input of guidance into pastoral care (65%).
- A majority of principals (65%) and guidance counsellors (85%) felt that some students were missing out on guidance and counselling that they need.
- Schools with an additional allocation under the GEI reported that the difference that this allocation made to the guidance provision was substantial, as it allowed for the implementation of targeted guidance interventions with both junior and senior cycle students.
- In many schools it was found that the role of the guidance counsellor was combined with that of subject teacher; three quarters of the guidance counsellors surveyed engaged in teaching, with more than a third spending more than 12 hours per week on subject teaching.
- Some students reported ambivalence about accessing personal counselling due to difficulties that the dual roles of guidance counsellor/subject teacher raised for them.
- Specific guidance programmes for junior cycle students were not well developed in many schools. In the majority of schools, guidance provision was still concentrated mainly on providing for the guidance needs of students in senior cycle.
- Guidance counsellors whose schools had a well developed pastoral care structure expressed greater satisfaction with the way that guidance was being integrated into the support services provided for their students.

- Guidance counsellors working in GEI schools and in single sex girls' schools expressed the most satisfaction with their respective schools' support structures. Those working in single sex boys' secondary schools expressed the least satisfaction.
- A majority of schools had established contacts with support services such as, NEPS, NEWB, the Garda Síochána, JLO, social workers and other support agencies. However, dissatisfaction was expressed with the level of support received from some of the services and with the delay in accessing them.
- Only 32% of principals reported that they allocate a specific budget to the guidance service.
- The review found that the profile of guidance counsellors was changing. Two thirds of the practitioners were female and over a third of the cohort were qualified for twenty years or more. Not all schools had the services of a trained guidance counsellor, 18% of those delivering guidance did not have a guidance qualification.
- Regarding the personal counselling element of guidance, there were mixed views about how it should be structured, who should provide it and where it should be available. Across all strands, however, the need to make personal counselling available to those students who need it was stressed.
- The need for the provision of increased hours for guidance was raised in all strands of the review
- Parents expressed a desire to be more involved in their children's career guidance and for this involvement to occur sooner in the students' school experience.

Chapter 3

Strand 1

A quantitative and qualitative survey of the use of the resources
provided by the Department of Education and Science for
Guidance and Counselling

carried out by the

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION



Linda Darbey, Deirdre Teeling

INTRODUCTION

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire, which included quantitative and qualitative questions, was distributed to Principals in 738 second level schools by the Department of Education and Science in November 2003. Only questionnaires signed off by the principal were considered for analysis. 624 schools responded to the questionnaire representing an 85% response rate, an excellent response for a postal survey. The data from 13 questions were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. A qualitative analysis was undertaken of the last three questions. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented in this Chapter.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results and analysis of the quantitative questions are presented under the following headings:

- Guidance Provision;
- Profile of the Guidance Counsellor;
- Guidance Resources within the School;
- The Guidance Programme and Plan.

GUIDANCE PROVISION

The first four questions of the questionnaire examined guidance provision in post-primary schools. For the purposes of the analysis responses were divided into schools in the free education scheme (FES) and schools not in the free education scheme. The responses were also examined in terms of school size and type.

A. Principals' Report of the Department of Education and Science Allocation of Hours for Guidance

Schools in the FES

Approximately 75% (414) of respondents report a current allocation from the Department equal to their qualification under Schedule A. 10% (54) report an allocation greater than their qualification under Schedule A. Table 1 below provides a summary of the results.

Table 1: Principals' Report of Current DES Allocation (in FES)

Base: 556 valid responses

SCHOOL SIZE	NO. OF HOURS	NO. OF SCHOOLS	% OF SCHOOLS
< 200 students (DES alloc. = 8 hrs per wk)	<8 hours	21	32
	8 hours	38	59
	8> hours	6	10
200-249 students (DES alloc. = 8.8 hrs per wk)	<=8 hours	11	33
	8> and <11 hours	15	46
	11=> hours	7	21
250-499 students (DES alloc. = 11 hrs per wk)	<11 hours	19	8
	11 hours	183	77
	11> hours	35	15
500-799 students (DES alloc = 22 hrs per wk)	<22 hours	24	14
	22 hours	148	83
	22> hours	6	3
800-999 students (DES alloc. = 33 hrs per wk)	<33 hours	7	25
	33 hours	21	75
1000+ students (DES alloc. = 44 hrs per wk)	<44 hours	6	40
	44 hours	9	60

#: percentages are calculated within school size categories. Percentages are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Shaded areas indicate that the allocation reported by the Principal is equal to the DES allocation.

Of the 88 schools (16%) that reported an allocation less than their qualification under Schedule A, 21 (24%) had an enrolment of <200 students, 19 (22%) had 250-499 and 24 (27%) had 500-799 students. Of the 88 schools, 52% were vocational and 35% were secondary schools.

Overall, 11% of all secondary schools, 25% of all vocational schools and 15% of all community and comprehensive schools reported an allocation from the Department less than their qualification under Schedule A.

Schools not in the FES

One school not in the FES reports an allocation of less than its qualification under Schedule B. It can be observed from Schedule B that schools with an enrolment of less than 350 students do not have an official allocation from the Department. Arrangements are made on a local basis between the Department and non FES schools. However, all respondents in this category report an allocation from the Department varying from less than 8 hours to less than 22 hours per week.

Table 2: Principals' Report of Current DES Allocation (not in FES)

Base: 41 valid responses

SCHOOL SIZE	NO. OF HOURS	NO. OF SCHOOLS	% OF SCHOOLS
<350 students	<8 hours	2	18
	8 hours	3	27
	8> and <11 hours	1	9
	11 hours	4	36
	11> and <22 hours	1	9
350-499 students (DES alloc. = 11 hrs per wk)	<8 hours	1	9
	11 hours	9	82
	11> and <22 hours	1	9
500+ students (DES alloc. = 22 hrs per wk)	22 hours	17	90
	33 hours	2	11

?: percentages are calculated within school size categories. Percentages are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Shaded areas indicate that the allocation reported by the principal is equal to the DES allocation.

B. Additional Hours from within the General Teacher Allocation and from External Sources

29% (167) of principals from FES schools report providing additional hours for guidance from within the general teacher allocation. Of these 167 schools 42% provide over 8 hours. Examining the type of school providing additional hours, 56% are secondary, 31% are vocational and 13% community and comprehensive.

10% (56) of principals reported providing additional hours from external sources.

Across non FES schools, 44% (22 schools) of principals reported providing additional hours for guidance from within the general teacher allocation and 28% (14 schools) from external sources.

C. Total number of Hours allocated to Guidance

FES Schools

Approximately 39% (214) of schools report a total number of hours allocated to guidance equal to their qualification under Schedule A. 50% (273) reported allocating a greater number of hours than their qualification under Schedule A. Of the 11% (61 schools) allocating less than their qualification, 18 have an enrolment of less than 200 students, 10 have an enrolment of 250-499 students and 20 an enrolment of 500-799 students. Table 3 below provides a summary of these findings.

Table 3: Principals' Report of Total Guidance Allocation

Base: 548 valid responses

SCHOOL SIZE	NO. HRS	SCHOOLS	
		No.	%
<200 students (DES alloc. = 8 hrs per wk)	<8 hours	18	27
	8 hours	29	43
	8> hours	20	30
200-249 students (DES alloc. = 8.8 hrs per wk)	< = 8 hours	8	24
	8> and <11 hours	7	21
	11=> hours	19	56
250-499 students (DES alloc. = 11 hrs per wk)	<11 hours	10	4
	11 hours	69	29
	11> hours	159	67
500-799 students (DES alloc. = 22 hrs per wk)	<22 hours	20	12
	22 hours	84	51
	22> hours	62	37
800-999 students (DES alloc. = 33 hrs per wk)	<33 hours	3	11
	33 hours	12	43
	33> hours	13	46
1000+ students	<33 hours	2	13

(DES alloc. = 44 hrs per wk)	44+ hours	13	87
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#: percentages are calculated within school size categories. Percentages are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Shaded areas indicate that the allocation reported by the Principal is equal to the DES allocation.

Across school type, 31% of the 61 are secondary, 64% vocational and 5% community and comprehensive.

Overall, within school type 7% (19) of all secondary schools, 20% (39) of vocational schools and 4% (3) of community and comprehensive schools provide an allocation less than their qualification under Schedule A.

Comparing responses to question 1a (principal's knowledge of current allocation from the Department) and question 4 (the total guidance allocation to the school) there is a variation in responses to the two questions for community and comprehensive schools. 15% (11) of respondents to question 1a report an allocation less than their qualification under Schedule A while 4% (3) of respondents to question 4 allocate a total number of guidance hours less than their qualification under Schedule A. It would appear from the data that these schools are granting resources from within the general teacher allocation and from external sources to the guidance service that should already be allocated according to their qualification under Schedule A.

Non FES Schools

One school reports providing a total guidance allocation of less than its qualification under Schedule B. However, schools with an enrolment of less than 350 students do not have an official allocation from the Department. All schools (19) in this category report allocating hours to guidance with 12 providing 11 hours and over. Six schools reported the provision of less than 8 hours indicating perhaps that in these schools very little guidance is available to students.

PROFILE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR

This section will examine the profile of the guidance counsellor including the number of schools with one or more guidance counsellors, the gender and qualifications of guidance counsellors.

Table 4: Profile of Staff with Guidance Hours

Base: 590 valid responses

Staff member	Gender of Staff %		Guidance Qualification	Year Qualified		
	Male	Female		1994-2004	1983-93	Pre 1983
1	36%	64%	82% - Yes	49%	17%	34%
2	34%	66%	68% - Yes	67%	15%	18%
3	30%	70%	50% - Yes	79%	7%	14%

81% (477) of respondents report having one staff member to whom guidance hours have been allocated.

Table 4 highlights the profile of staff with guidance hours. Examining *staff member 1*, 82% (497) reported having a guidance qualification obtained either in Ireland or abroad, nearly half have qualified in the last 10 years and 64% are female. Over one third (34%) of guidance counsellors reported that they qualified pre 1983. This indicates that recruiting qualified guidance counsellors to replace those retiring will be an issue to be faced by the Department and schools over the next decade or so. Of the 18% (107) who did not indicate a guidance qualification, 4% indicated having a post-graduate qualification, 6% reported having an undergraduate qualification and 7% did not respond to the question. The percentage in each category increases for *staff members 2 and 3*. Concerns could be raised over whether the 18% of staff working without a guidance qualification are appropriately qualified to undertake specialist guidance work, and what the implications are for the Department and schools. Given the number of guidance counsellors who have been qualified for 10 years or more there is a need for continuing professional education and training and the support of such by the Department.

Table 5: Allocation of Guidance Hours to Staff

Staff member	Guidance hours per week	
	22 hours	11 – 21 hours
1	36%	44%
2	12%	51%
3	8%	29%

Examining table 5, 80% of *staff member 1*, 63% of *staff member 2* and 37% of *staff member 3* have 11 hours or greater for guidance each week. This emphasises further the point made above in relation to future recruitment as the majority of posts that will become available will be half time and full-time posts.

GUIDANCE RESOURCES WITHIN THE SCHOOL

Principals were asked about guidance counsellors' access to an office, ICT and the allocation of a budget to guidance. ICT provision includes guidance counsellors' access to a computer and internet access.

95% of Principals indicated that the guidance counsellor has his/her own office.

96% of Principals indicated that the guidance counsellor has a computer, and 90% indicated that the computer has internet access. The situation has improved since the 'Audit of Guidance in Post-Primary Schools' was undertaken by the NCGE on behalf of the DES in 1999. In 1999, 68% of respondents indicated that the guidance counsellor had a computer for his/her own use and only 47% had a computer with internet access. The improvement is attributed to the *Schools IT 2000 Initiative* under which every guidance counsellor was provided with a computer.

Principals were asked in question 11 if the school had a designated budget for guidance and to indicate the amount. Only 32% (182) responded to this question indicating perhaps that the majority of principals do not allocate a specific budget to the guidance service. Of the 32%, 124 indicated allocating a budget of €1,000 or less and almost half of the 124 schools reported having less than €500. This raises

questions over the resources available to the guidance service to purchase psychometric tests, to cover expenses for IGC membership, attendance at in-service etc. For the planning of an effective guidance service in the school there needs to be a specific budget allocated.

THE GUIDANCE PROGRAMME AND PLAN

This section examines the percentage of reported total guidance time allocated to junior and senior cycles. Guidance activities included in the school's provision of guidance are examined. The number of schools with a school development plan and a guidance plan are also indicated.

A. Percentage of Total Guidance Time Allocated to Junior and Senior Cycle Groups

For the purposes of this analysis respondents have been divided into principals who reported having and not having additional hours under the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI). 15% (93) of respondents reported an allocation from the GEI.

Junior Cycle

Taking schools that reported having no allocation under the GEI, 80% (355) of respondents reported spending less than one third of their time with junior cycle students. In comparison 58% (52) of respondents with GEI hours reported spending one third of their time with junior cycle students. One of the aims of the GEI is to provide guidance in junior cycle in order to prevent early school and to combat disadvantage.

From the results it would appear that the provision of guidance to junior cycle students would need to be examined and emphasised, as junior cycle is an important time for students when decisions made can have implications for the future. Providing guidance at junior cycle may prevent difficulties from arising at a later stage.

Senior Cycle

At senior cycle, 59% (294) of respondents with no allocation under the GEI report spending over 70% of time with senior cycle students. In comparison 29% (27) of

schools with a GEI post report spending over 70% of time with senior cycle students suggesting that GEI schools offer a more balanced guidance programme.

B. Guidance Activities and Associated Target Groups included in the School's Provision of Guidance

In question 13 principals were asked to indicate guidance activities and associated target groups included in the school's provision of guidance. There was no division of schools by type, size or allocations from the GEI for this analysis.

Junior Cycle

88% (512) of respondents reported guidance time was spent on the provision of educational development programmes as part of the guidance service. This was closely followed by 86% (499) on one to one personal counselling and 83% (479) on information provision. Consultation with parents was also high with 81% (468) of respondents indicating that time is spent undertaking this activity. 11% (64) of respondents reported time spent on organising work placement and shadowing.

Senior Cycle

Almost all (96%) respondents (577) indicated that guidance time is spent on the provision of one to one careers and educational guidance and information provision at senior cycle. This is closely followed by 92% (553) on the provision of educational development programmes, 91% (549) on one to one personal counselling, and careers and educational group work. Consultation with parents is also considered important at senior cycle with 91% (544) of respondents indicating that they undertake this guidance activity.

Examining the responses of junior and senior cycle the percentage of respondents indicating time spent on a number of guidance activities are similar. For instance over 85% of respondents indicated providing one to one personal counselling at both junior and senior cycles and over 82% of respondents reported time spent on information provision. Looking closer at personal counselling 40% (231) of respondents indicated undertaking personal/group counselling at junior cycle and 47% (280) at senior cycle. To maximise resources available to the guidance programme there may be a need for guidance counsellors to provide more group

guidance. There is an implication for the provision of in-service and initial training in this area. In addition, when examining information provision there is a need to support students perhaps through ICT in sourcing information and becoming in effect, career self managers.

C. Guidance Plan

Principals were asked in questions 9 and 10 if the school has a school plan, if guidance forms part of the plan and whether the school has a written school guidance plan.

53% (295) of respondents indicated that there is a written school development plan of which 66% (233) indicated that guidance provision forms part of the school plan. 36% (201) of respondents indicated that the school had a written school guidance plan. It is important to note that the Review was undertaken before 'Planning the School Guidance Programme' was published by the NCGE and before support was provided to guidance counsellors and schools in guidance planning. This figure is expected to increase as a result. There is an implication for the continuing professional training and development of school staff and appropriate resources and support are required.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The qualitative data in the Review (Strand 1) was generated from the responses to Questions 15, 16 and 17 on the questionnaire. The purpose of these questions was to supplement information from the quantitative study and to provide scope for schools to raise additional issues regarding guidance provision.

While it was apparent that in some cases the guidance counsellor answered the questions, all the questionnaires analysed were signed off by the principal.

STRENGTHS OF THE GUIDANCE PROGRAMME

Question 15 asked what the strengths of the guidance programme were within the school. The three most consistent themes to emerge from the responses were:

A. The Personal Qualities and Personality of the Guidance Counsellor

The personal qualities and personality of the guidance counsellor and relationships with students, staff, parents and the wider community were praised. References were made to the guidance counsellor's 'flexibility,' 'accessibility,' 'availability,' 'commitment,' and 'approachability.' The guidance counsellor was frequently described as hardworking, having 'an open door policy' and willing 'to work beyond the allocation of hours.'

'The ability to give adequate time to explore personal and career related issues with students on a personal basis' was singled out as the main strength of the guidance programme. Access to the guidance counsellor by parents on an individual basis was also regarded as an integral strength.

B. Extra Time Given by the Guidance Counsellor

Principals paid tribute to the extra hours worked by guidance counsellors, commenting on the amount of 'voluntary work' done whereby they gave time 'beyond the call of duty.' The comment that 'the hours worked in school by the guidance counsellors far exceed any allocation of time from the DES,' was echoed by a number of principals.

Some schools referred to the increased workload on the guidance counsellor as a result of reduced time allocations.

‘The guidance counsellor who previously had one full-time guidance provision by the Department of Education and Science is now only allocated 0.5 guidance provision. She is trying to fit in all her previous work within the eleven hours provided.’

C. Individual Counselling

Counselling, and in particular individual one-to-one counselling, was seen above all else as one of the major strengths of the guidance programme. Individual focus and attention were valued. Care for the individual student, ‘lots of one-to-one client contact’, ‘approachability of guidance counsellors in terms of personal counselling as reflected in the huge demands and uptake of service provided’ were stressed as invaluable and essential aspects of a quality service. ‘The counsellor deals with a lot of students on an individual basis and knows students individually’.

However, achieving a balance between group and individual guidance was seen by one principal as of importance. ‘I think the strength of guidance in our school is that our students are exposed to individual guidance as well as group guidance. They personally benefit from exposure at both levels.’

Senior cycle students in general receive much of the one-to-one attention, particularly in the careers area. ‘Careers area is strongest at senior level – only because the majority of the allocation is spent there’.

Additional Themes

Other themes that emerged with less frequency from Question 15 included the benefits of a collaborative approach to guidance within the school, the positive impact of the Guidance Enhancement Initiative allocation, the benefits of psychometric testing and the advantages of small student numbers in some schools. It is worth noting that some principals reported using assessment test results to confirm ‘correct streaming’ and ‘to diagnose students with learning difficulties.’ In

addition to taking account of current concerns about the negative effects of streaming, the use of test results for these purposes needs further consideration.

AREAS OF THE GUIDANCE PROGRAMME TO BE DEVELOPED

In question 16 schools were asked for the areas of the guidance programme that they would like to develop further.

A. Counselling

The most widely cited area for further development, described in all settings, was the need for personal counselling. Most principals desired to expand the availability of this service and their comments can be summed up in the words of a principal who wrote,

‘The vast majority of our students in mainstream are having to deal with disadvantaged circumstances. In view of this reality, there is an increasing demand for counselling services’.

Linked with this are the time and resources necessary to implement such a service. One principal stressed the need for ‘more time for one-to-one personal counselling as problems could be solved by people knowing the situation at the initial stages’. Counselling, especially one-to-one counselling, would put more emphasis on preventative work and result in less ‘fire brigade action’. ‘A counselling service would do much to enhance the personal lives and therefore the academic outlook for a significant number of students’. ‘More manpower (sic) is required to provide individual counselling to students who have all kinds of problems due to family breakdown and other problems’.

Allied to this need for one-to-one counselling is the backup of a service like the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). ‘There is a strong need for more psychologists’ time to deal with an ever increasing volume of referrals and assessments’. Another principal wished for ‘greater assessment of students by psychologists which is currently very difficult to achieve’.

B. Junior Cycle Students

The question of making time available to junior cycle students and the present neglect of these students was also a frequently expressed comment in relation to areas for further development.

Closer contact with First, Second and Third Years was considered important to encourage students to 'do their best from Year 1,' 'to help them understand subject choice implications' and to focus on students at risk of leaving school.

Another area of development which concerns the junior cycle student is one-to-one counselling, but according to principals 'at this level the reality is that there is not time available for this'.

C. Time and Resources

In the examination of the two major areas of suggested development - personal (individual) counselling and guidance provision for junior cycle students – the question of time and resources and how they are linked to further development were highlighted in the responses.

Principals expressed frustration and were forceful in their concerns and comments. They referred to 'the appalling lack of resources available to us. With a decent allocation we could develop in many ways'. The lack of full-time guidance counsellors was a concern to many of them.

'No further development is possible without first securing a full-time teaching position for the guidance counsellor. This must be addressed as an urgent priority'.

There was a particular focus on the allocation of 11 hours of guidance per week. 'I believe the service is sadly lacking – as our guidance counsellor has only an 11 hour allocation'. Further comments included the following: 'guidance hours are not enough for the task in hand'. 'given a half quota allocation no further development is feasible'. 'The idea that a school such as ours should have only 11 hours guidance

is ludicrous. Our guidance counsellor is working flat out within this allocation'. 'There is a need for an improvement in the guidance provision. .5 is insufficient for the numbers'.

Personal contact at earlier stages, which was viewed as desirable for the Junior Cycle, was seen to have time and resource implications. However, Principals could see 'no way that more individual counselling and guidance can take place within the present allocation'. According to one Principal, '11 hours ex-quota is totally inadequate for a school of 477 students'.

The majority of respondents expressed a need for more hours to enhance the service and further development was viewed as being dependent on this.

D Computer Aided Guidance

Computer aided guidance was another suggested area for further development. Use of a computer room for the dissemination of information was high on the list of desired future resources. Internet connection and access for all students was thought to be an ideal future way of gathering information. In the words of one principal, 'we would like our students to have greater access to computer guidance programmes and to see computers play a more central part in guidance'.

It was hoped that 'information provision could be enhanced by making better use of the I. T. facilities in the school.' Broadband access was mentioned as something to hope for. The long-term goal would be computer aided guidance for all.

Additional themes

Other less frequently mentioned themes to emerge included links with industry, the need for adult guidance in PLC colleges, for multi-cultural guidance provision and for a guidance plan, specific programmes to promote the sciences and the impact of the pilot project 'Pathways through Education.'

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The final question, 17, asked respondents for additional comments relating to the questions posed in the questionnaire or relating to guidance provision. The vast majority of responses echoed the theme that the current allocation of hours for guidance is insufficient. This area of concern was more widely articulated than any other topic in the three qualitative questions.

A. Time Allocation for Guidance

The call for additional guidance hours to be allocated was consistent across all sectors, locations and school size. Principals stated that ‘time allocation is completely insufficient’, ‘there is a chronic need for a realistic allocation of guidance and counselling posts’, ‘provision of hours too small to provide a comprehensive service’.

Reduced guidance hours were seen as one reason for the present situation. ‘The school is suffering to a huge extent because of reduced guidance hours – marginalised students are not being catered for to the necessary levels’. The provision of guidance for junior cycle, Transition Year students, LCA and LC was considered impossible with an allocation of 11 hours for guidance, particularly in schools that had just under 500 students.

However, schools with a full-time guidance position, because of the numbers involved and the diversity of the work, reported similar problems. One principal wrote,

‘Provision of hours and resources for guidance is totally inadequate. Guidance personnel cannot cope with demands. This is not just another crib. Inadequacy of guidance provision is genuine’.

Some principals suggested that to overcome this shortfall in guidance provision hours should be allocated on a sliding scale.

‘Allocate more hours to guidance and counselling – at least allocate hours on a sliding scale. Full teacher allocation for 500 students and 0.5 for 499 does not make sense’.

‘In a school of 412 students 0.5 teacher allocation is not sufficient. If a school with 500 students is allowed one teacher – other schools should receive a pro-rata allowance’.

There was dissatisfaction expressed also with the present 1:500 student ratio in schools where this was operating. ‘In a school of 632 students the provision of one guidance counsellor is insufficient to adequately provide for all the areas of the service mentioned in the questionnaire’.

In disadvantaged schools the problems reported are more pronounced;

‘Allocations are totally inadequate. Demands in disadvantaged schools are excessive and are not addressed. Many students leave at Junior Certificate level with little or no help. International students have extra special needs. The number of questions you pose yourselves speaks volumes!!!’

Principals in large schools gave similar responses to those in small schools. ‘In view of the number of students, 700+, and the growing number of students with family problems – parental separation, lack of social skills, inadequate parenting, we need more guidance hours’.

Some principals reported taking extra time from general teaching hours to enhance the guidance provision. According to one,

‘We have 477 students and are only given 0.5 of a guidance counsellor by the DES. We have had to give an additional 11 hours guidance and counselling by employing part-time teachers to allow the guidance teacher to give a better service’.

The unease and disquiet reported by principals in relation to the allocation of time for guidance includes those with PLC courses where the large numbers of adult students require a guidance service appropriate to their needs.

B. Extra Guidance Hours

Principals reported in question 17 how, between their support and often the willingness of many guidance counsellors to work more hours on a voluntary basis, the service was maintained.

Some of the confusion reported in the quantitative data about the Department allocation for guidance surfaced again in this part of the questionnaire. For example one Principal reported, ‘while 18 hours is allocated to this school for guidance and counselling, many more hours over and beyond this are spent supporting the programme. We need to look at this’. Notwithstanding the principal’s statement that many more hours are needed for guidance, it is important to note that this school is entitled to an allocation of 22 hours for guidance from the DES. This raises the need for clarification for schools regarding Circular 31/83

C. Additional Resources Specifically for Counselling

Another need, but less frequently mentioned than time allocation, was that of additional resources for personal counselling. One principal expressed the demand for personal counselling as ‘overwhelming’. This was reiterated by another who reported that ‘with the level of family break-up and general family dysfunction in society at the moment the counselling side of guidance is essential and scarcely adequate to the school’s needs in this regard’.

The perceived need for counselling is expressed by principals in both urban and in rural areas. One remarked, 'given that our school is located in a very remote area – services such as counselling are not available unless students and parents travel very long distances. Schools need to be able to fill this gap'.

D. National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)/Supervision

The NEPS service was identified as needing to be expanded in order to provide support for the guidance service within the school. One principal stated that 'the NEPS service needs to be increased to a workable level. The present service is totally inadequate'. While another principal reported the opposite experience,

'An amount of time has been allocated to meetings between the counsellor and the school psychologist. In the last year our interaction with NEPS has been increased and the service is of a most satisfactory nature'.

Some schools expressed the need for supervision to be organised on a professional basis for their guidance counsellor.

E. The Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI)

The introduction of extra time allocation through the GEI was praised by any school which benefited from it. The differences made to the provision of guidance as a result of it were reported as remarkable. One principal reported.

'The provision through GEI has made such a positive impact on the whole school. It is now a pivotal area on many fronts at the school'.

In another school this is what was reported,

‘Since 2001 we have benefited from GEI. This has enabled us to expand our guidance in junior cycle. In the last two years the number of students going to 3rd level has increased by 100%.’

The difference made to the services provided by the GEI was reported as far reaching. ‘The allocation the school received under the GEI has enabled us to introduce programmes to tackle student disadvantage that otherwise would not have been possible’. ‘The GEI has given our school greater scope to assist students on an individual basis’

The overall feelings are expressed in the following observations. ‘The GEI is the single most effective intervention to help the school better serve all our students’. The long term security of the Guidance Enhancement Initiative was expressed as a priority for all concerned.

CONCLUSIONS

Allocation of Hours for Guidance

While the vast majority of schools (approximately 75%) in the Free Education Scheme are aware of the number of hours allocated to them for guidance purposes about one quarter are either underestimating or overestimating their allocation.

It is not evident from the data how schools have arrived at an overestimation of their hours. The data from schools with 500-799 students suggests that schools in this category who are underestimating their hours may be doing so on the basis of their interpretation of Circular 31/83. This Circular states that the allocation should include at least 12 hours of guidance work and at least 3 hours of ordinary classroom teaching. As a result schools may be deducting at least 3 hours from the 22 hours allocation.

While 25% of vocational schools report an allocation of less than their qualification under Schedule A it should also be noted that the VEC allocates hours to its own

schools and therefore the distribution may be on the basis of the perceived need of individual schools rather than on the basis of Schedule A.

At least one third of all schools are providing additional hours for guidance from within the general teacher allocation or from external sources. However, where schools are reporting in the quantitative data that they are using only the hours allocated, the qualitative data indicates that many guidance counsellors are working additional hours on a voluntary basis.

The qualitative data present a picture of schools being stretched to the limits of their resources to meet the demand for guidance provision. Additional hours for guidance were called for from across all school types, school size and geographic locations.

The current cut off points for allocation of hours for guidance appear to create difficulty in particular in schools where the student enrolment falls just short of a higher qualification. To provide a more flexible system of allocation some Principals have suggested replacing the current cut off points with a sliding scale.

Schools providing PLC courses report that they need an additional allocation of hours to provide guidance appropriate for adults.

Profile of the Guidance Counsellor

This study reveals that guidance in post primary schools is a feminised profession with approximately two thirds of practitioners being female. While the vast majority of guidance counsellors have guidance qualifications, 18% do not. Where those without a qualification are the main providers of guidance within the school the question arises as to the appropriateness of the guidance provision.

With just over one third of guidance counsellors being qualified for twenty years or more succession planning for those who will be retiring over the next decade needs to be considered. Continuing professional development is an issue which needs particular attention, as in the 81% of schools where there is one qualified guidance counsellor over half of them qualified ten or more years ago. Considerable developments have taken place during that time including in the areas of:

- ICT, particularly web-based guidance
- Improved access to education for students with special needs
- National priorities of lifelong learning and social inclusion
- Student entitlement to appropriate guidance
- Psychometric testing
- National qualifications framework
- Requirement for guidance programme planning

All of these developments have an impact on the school and the work of the guidance counsellor and without a comprehensive continuing professional development programme available to them it is difficult for guidance counsellors to up-grade their knowledge and skills.

The personal qualities of guidance counsellors are considered one of the main strengths of the guidance service in the post primary schools. They are characterised as approachable, flexible, committed and as dedicating many additional hours on a voluntary basis to the provision of guidance within the school.

Guidance Resources

The vast majority of guidance counsellors have an office, a computer and access to the internet. However, the qualitative data suggests that students do not have access to computers and the internet within the schools for guidance purposes. This indicates that a proportion of the guidance counsellor's time is being devoted in particular to disseminating information that students could access for themselves if the appropriate facilities were made available.

There is evidence that very few schools provide a designated budget for guidance. Where a budget is provided, in most cases, it is not sufficient to cover the normal expenses associated with a guidance service. It is difficult for a guidance counsellor to coordinate the planning of an effective guidance service without a clear indication of the funding available.

Guidance Programme

Where schools report having no allocation under the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI) a clear pattern emerges in the quantitative and qualitative data of a concentration on guidance at senior cycle. Almost all guidance counsellors in these schools provide individual personal, careers and educational guidance, information, educational development programmes and consultation with parents for senior cycle students. In the qualitative data principals expressed concern about the neglect of the junior cycle, but could see no way of providing any more than what is currently available at this level.

In schools with a GEI allocation there is evidence of a more balanced approach in the guidance provided to junior and senior cycle students. It is not surprising therefore that some principals expressed concern as to whether the funding for this Initiative will be continued.

In all schools where guidance is provided in the junior cycle the focus is on educational development programmes, individual counselling and information provision.

The model of guidance in operation in post primary schools puts a strong emphasis on one-to-one guidance at both junior and senior cycle. The qualitative data indicates that this individual focus is highly valued by principals, guidance counsellors and students, particularly where personal counselling is concerned. In fact, most principals report a need for additional counselling hours. This model of guidance is resource intensive, particularly where all students have an entitlement to appropriate guidance. It also needs the support of a well resourced psychological service where students need personal counselling over a protracted period and the guidance counsellor does not have the appropriate qualifications or the time to devote to these students. Currently guidance counsellors seem to be trying to cope with the demand for individual counselling without sufficient support and at an increasing cost in terms of their own time.

The provision of information is another guidance activity that the majority of guidance counsellors engage in at junior and senior cycles.

Guidance Programme Planning

Guidance programme planning enables schools to maximise resources in order to focus on their priority guidance areas and to identify gaps in their guidance provision. While the questionnaire was completed before the publication of NCGE's 'Planning the School Guidance Programme', some schools reported having a guidance plan. To support and encourage schools in this development continuing professional development is critical.

Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI)

The GEI was praised by all schools with this allocation and it was reported as enabling them to provide guidance at junior cycle on both a group and individual level. It was seen as enhancing student retention in junior cycle and encouraging progression to higher education. The one concern expressed was that the funding would continue.

Chapter 4

Strand 2

A quantitative postal survey targeting 260 schools
across the country

carried out by the

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)



SELINA MCCOY, EMER SMYTH, MERIKE DARMODY AND

ALLISON DUNNE

1.1 Methodology

The first phase of the study involved a quantitative postal survey targeting 260 schools across the country. Schools were selected to be nationally representative by school type and size. Questionnaires were administered to principals, guidance counsellors and teachers with an allocation of guidance hours. The achieved sample was 168 principals, giving a response rate of 65 per cent, and 188 guidance counsellors or teachers with guidance duties, giving at least one guidance counsellor in 57 per cent of the schools surveyed. The data were re-weighted to adjust for school sector, school size and disadvantaged status.

This Chapter summarises principals' and guidance counsellors' views and experiences across a number of areas. Beginning with the views of principals, section 1.2 gives an overview of overall support structures in schools. The nature of general support structures or pastoral care systems is considered, along with some analysis of the extent to which principals are satisfied with current provision. The discussion also examines the involvement of guidance counsellors across a range of academic, vocational and personal/social guidance areas. Finally, this section explores the attitudes and views of principals regarding guidance services in their school, the level of resources for guidance, the adequacy of the service and the perceived views of other staff in the school. A similar format is adopted in section 1.3, drawing on the experiences of guidance counsellors themselves. A summary and conclusions are presented in section 1.4.

1.2 Principals' Perspectives on Guidance Services

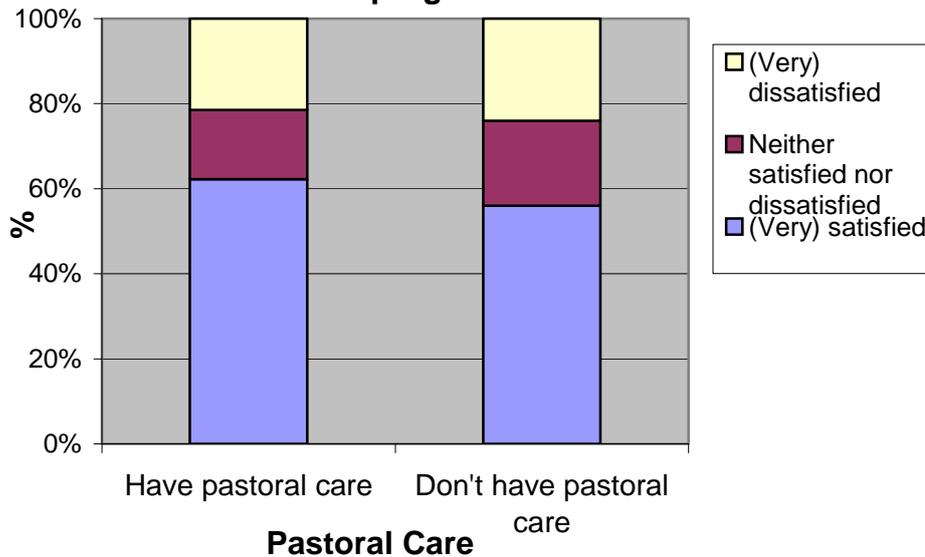
General Support Structures

The vast majority of schools (84 per cent) have a pastoral care programme¹⁶ available for their students. Seventy-six per cent of the programmes apply to all students, 16 per cent to all junior cycle students, 4 per cent to senior cycle students and 2 per cent to first year students only. Those principals in schools offering a pastoral care programme are somewhat more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied

¹⁶ A system to support students – typically comprising tutor/year head and guidance counsellor/chaplain supports.

with the support structures in their school, although the differences are not statistically significant (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Satisfaction with supports for students and whether school has pastoral care programme



While school principals were generally satisfied with the overall support structures across all school types, a considerable minority (22 per cent) of the schools were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the support structures in the school. There was some variation by school type (see Figure 2); principals in girls' secondary schools were on average more satisfied (69 per cent) with the support structures while vocational school principals were least likely to be satisfied (56 per cent), although the differences were not statistically significant. Schools designated disadvantaged were somewhat more likely than non-designated disadvantaged schools to report that they were satisfied/very satisfied with the support structures in their school (see Figure 3). In addition, schools participating in the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI) were on average more satisfied with the overall support systems for students in their school: while 77 per cent of GEI schools were satisfied with the support systems, 59 per cent of non-GEI schools were similarly satisfied.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with support structures and school type

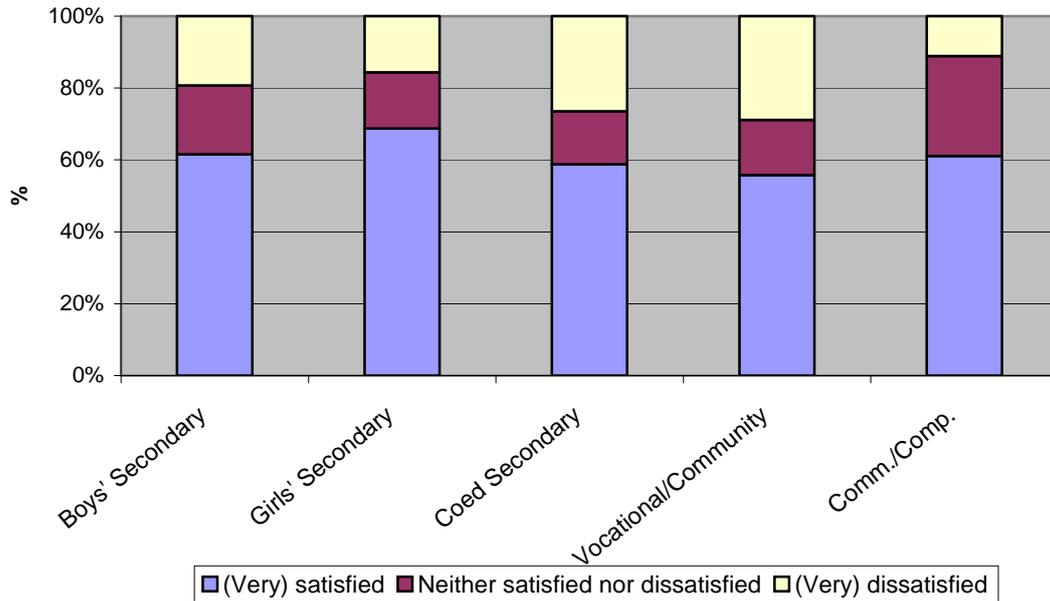
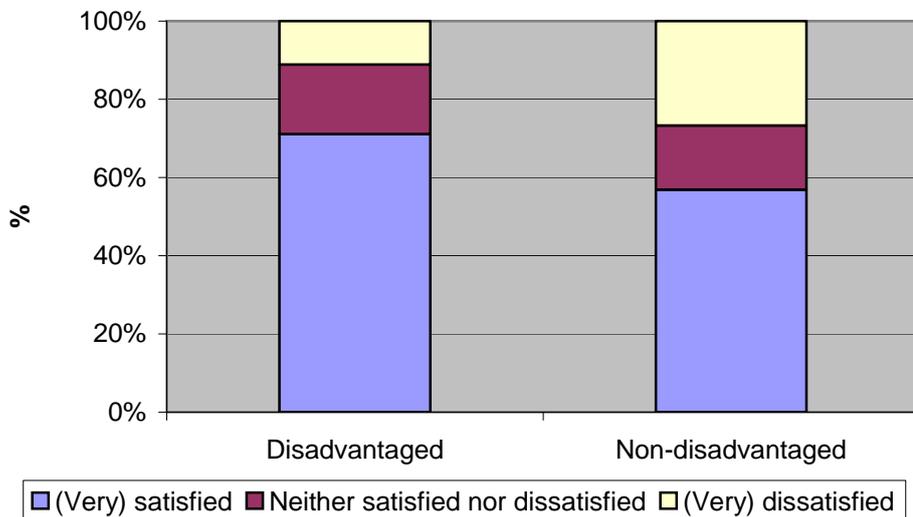


Figure 3: Satisfaction with support structures by designated disadvantaged status



There was a significant difference in overall satisfaction levels between those schools where the principal reported a higher frequency of involvement of the guidance

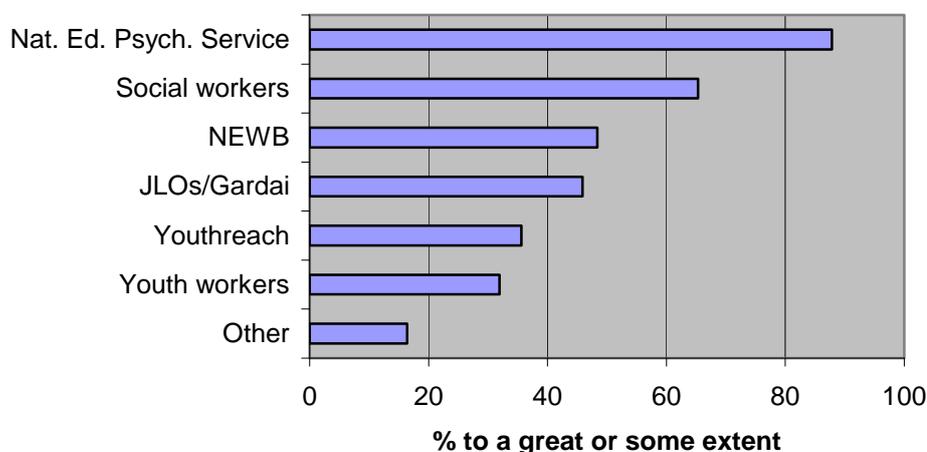
counsellor in activities in the school, such as assisting students with learning difficulties and social/personal support, and those who had a lower frequency of reported guidance counsellor involvement. Those where guidance counsellors were reported to be more involved in activities were on average significantly more satisfied with the support structures in their school.

When principals were asked what other supports they would like to see in place for students, 29 per cent responded that they would like to see more guidance hours or an improved ratio of guidance counsellors to students. A further quarter said they would like counselling to be available, including bereavement counselling.

Liaison with external services/agencies

The National Educational Psychological Service was the main external agency principals reported that their school liaised with. Two-thirds said that they liaised with Social Workers, while just under half had contact with the National Educational Welfare Board (School Attendance Officer). Just under half had liaised with Juvenile Liaison Officers or the Gardai, 36 per cent with Youthreach and almost one-third with Youth Workers.

Figure 4: The extent to which the school liaises with external services/agencies



Specific support structures

The survey captured important information on the extent to which schools had put specific support structures in place for students with specific needs: these included those with learning difficulties, those from the non-national community and those from the Travelling community. In total, 44 per cent of principals reported that their school had specific support structures in place for non-national students. A majority (62 per cent) of principals stated that they did not have any specific supports in place for students from Travelling families. Those who reported providing supports mainly provided extra learning support.

Seventy-nine per cent of principals surveyed said they have specific supports for students with special needs (disabilities). These provisions centred on learning supports, resource/special needs teachers and Special Needs Assistance (SNA). The majority of schools (91 per cent) also have supports for students with learning difficulties. These supports typically centre on learning support teachers, resource and special needs teachers and small group tuition.

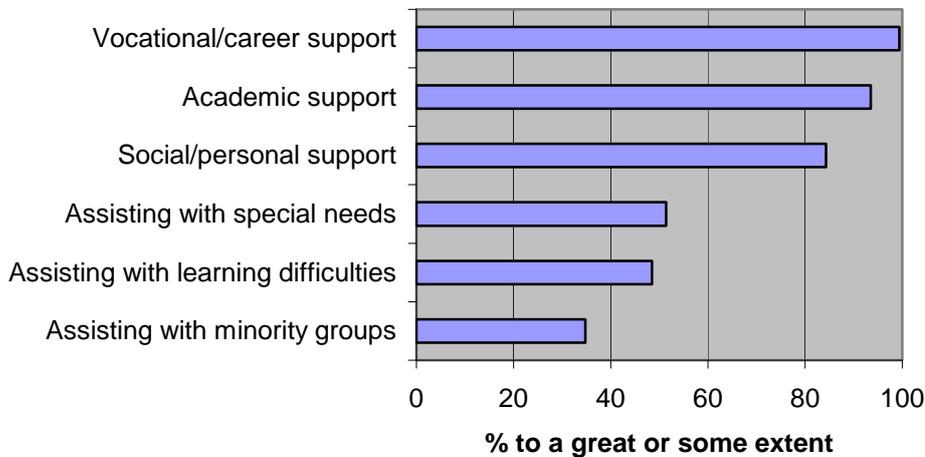
Guidance counsellor's involvement in main activities

Almost all principals reported that the guidance counsellor(s) in their school was either to a great extent or to some extent involved in vocational or career-related support and guidance (Figure 5). Similarly, the vast majority (94 per cent) stated that the guidance counsellor was involved in general academic¹⁷ support and guidance to a great extent or to some extent. The next most important activity related to the area of personal and social support or counselling (84 per cent).

Guidance counsellors were not as involved when it came to assisting students with special needs (half of cases), students with learning difficulties (half) or students from minority groups (one third).

¹⁷ The term academic guidance relates to advice on educational or academic issues such as subject choice, subject level decisions and the selection of Leaving Certificate programme.

Figure 5: Guidance counsellor involvement in various activities (great/some extent)



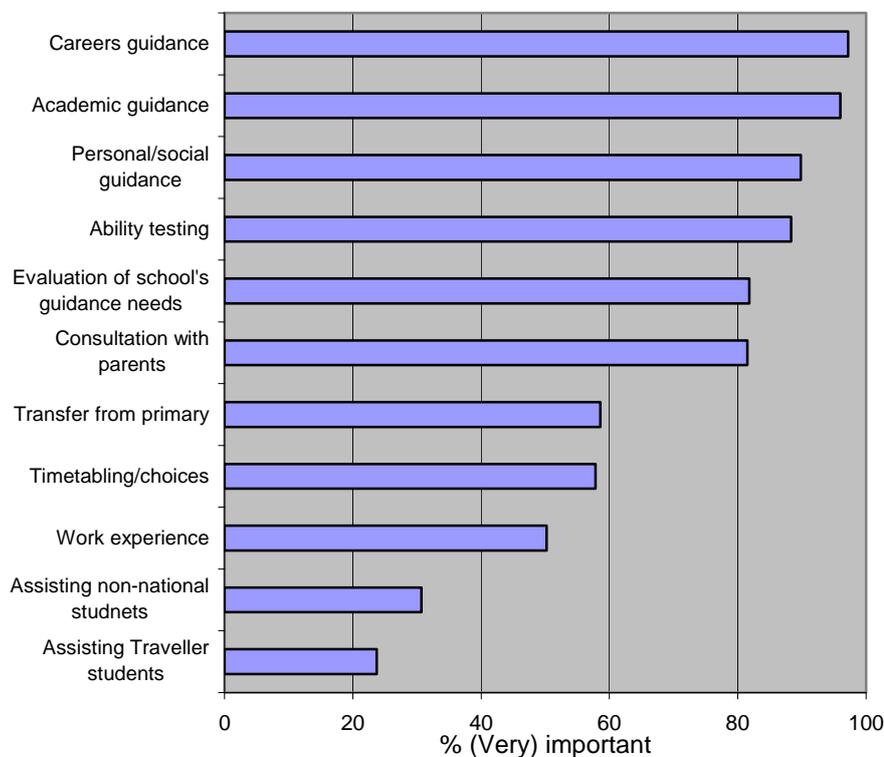
There is some variation in guidance counsellor involvement in various activities across different types of school. In schools designated disadvantaged and schools involved in the GEI, guidance counsellors are more involved in assisting students with special needs. In very small schools (<250 students), guidance counsellors are much less likely to be involved in general academic support than in larger schools. Guidance counsellors in GEI schools are somewhat more likely to be involved to a great extent in personal support/counselling than in non-GEI schools.

Guidance Counsellor involvement in range of areas

The survey data also captured the involvement of guidance counsellors in a wider range of activities, including ability-testing, work experience and contact with parents (Figure 6). Three key areas were mentioned by over 90 per cent of principals: providing career/employment-related guidance, academic guidance and personal and social guidance. Guidance counsellors were also reported by the majority of principals to be very important or important in dealing with ability testing/student assessment (88 per cent), while most principals also reported that the guidance counsellor played an important role in the evaluation of the school's guidance needs and consulting with parents.

Activities in which guidance counsellors were not considered as involved were assisting with the transfer from primary to secondary school (59 per cent), organising subject choices/packages/timetabling (58 per cent) and dealing with work experience (50 per cent). Assisting non-national students and assisting students from traveller families were seen as not very important or were seen as unimportant activities for the guidance counsellor by the majority of school principals.

Figure 6: Importance of guidance counsellor in specified activities



Principals were asked what they considered to be the single most important activity of the guidance counsellor in the school: providing personal and social support was most frequently mentioned (37 per cent), followed by providing careers-related advice (34 per cent) and providing academic guidance (12 per cent).

Approaches to subject choice at Junior Cycle and Role of Guidance Counsellor

There are three main approaches to subject choice taken by the schools in the survey. Twenty-nine per cent of schools let students try out subjects for the whole of first year before they choose their subjects. In 29 per cent of schools students choose their subjects before entering first year and a further 25 per cent of schools let students try out subjects for part of first year before choosing (see Table 1).

Table 1: Approach to subject choice at Junior Certificate

Choice	%
Students do not have a choice of subjects	9.8
Students choose before entering 1 st year	28.5
Students try out subjects for part of 1 st year	25.2
Students try out subjects for whole of 1 st year	29.2
Other	7.3
Total No of Schools	164

At junior cycle stage the main person mentioned by school principals with responsibility for advising students on subject choice in the school is the guidance counsellor (mentioned in 71 per cent of cases). School principals were mentioned in almost half of the cases, subject teachers in 41 per cent of schools and year heads and deputy principals both mentioned 22-23 per cent of the time.

At senior cycle stage guidance counsellors play a key role in advising students on their choice of subjects (94 per cent of cases), while subject teachers (46 per cent), school principals (41 per cent), deputy principals and year heads (23 per cent of cases) also play a role.

However, the role of the guidance counsellor in subject choice decisions clearly depended on the timing of subject choice. In schools where principals reported that the students choose their subjects before entering first year, the person with greatest responsibility for advising students on subject choice at junior cycle was the school principal (mentioned in 67 per cent of cases), with guidance counsellors mentioned

in 63 per cent of cases¹⁸. In schools where the principal reported that students try out subjects for part of first year before choosing, the guidance counsellor played a stronger role and was mentioned in 71 per cent of such schools. In schools where the principal reported that students try out subjects for all of first year, a similar pattern to schools where students try out subjects for part of first year was observed. Guidance counsellors were mentioned in 81 per cent of cases. It appears that the role of the principal in advising students on subject choice in the junior cycle diminishes when students are allowed to choose their subjects after they start in the school and have an opportunity to try out subjects for a period of time.

Written Guidance Plan

The majority of schools have no written guidance plan (71 per cent). As one might expect, those who report having a guidance plan tend to be more satisfied with the support structures in their school than those principals who report not having a guidance plan. Almost a quarter of those with a written guidance plan are very satisfied compared to 14 per cent of those with no written plan (however, these differences were not statistically significant).

Satisfaction with Guidance Provision

Generally school principals were satisfied or very satisfied with the guidance services their school provided. Over 85 per cent were (very) satisfied with the Vocational and Career Guidance and the Academic Guidance in the school. Principals were not as satisfied with Personal/Social Guidance and Counselling (67 per cent) or with the input into Pastoral Care Provision (65 per cent). This indicates a gap between careers/academic guidance provision and social/personal guidance provision. Schools that were taking part in the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI) were on average more satisfied with the personal/social guidance and counselling and the input into Pastoral Care for students in their school. However, these differences were not statistically significant. There was also a significant correlation between the level of involvement of the guidance counsellor in activities

¹⁸ Percentages add to more than 100 as principals could pick more than one option.

in the school such as assisting students with learning difficulties and social/personal support and how satisfied principals were with guidance services. The more involved guidance counsellors were, the more principals reported being satisfied.

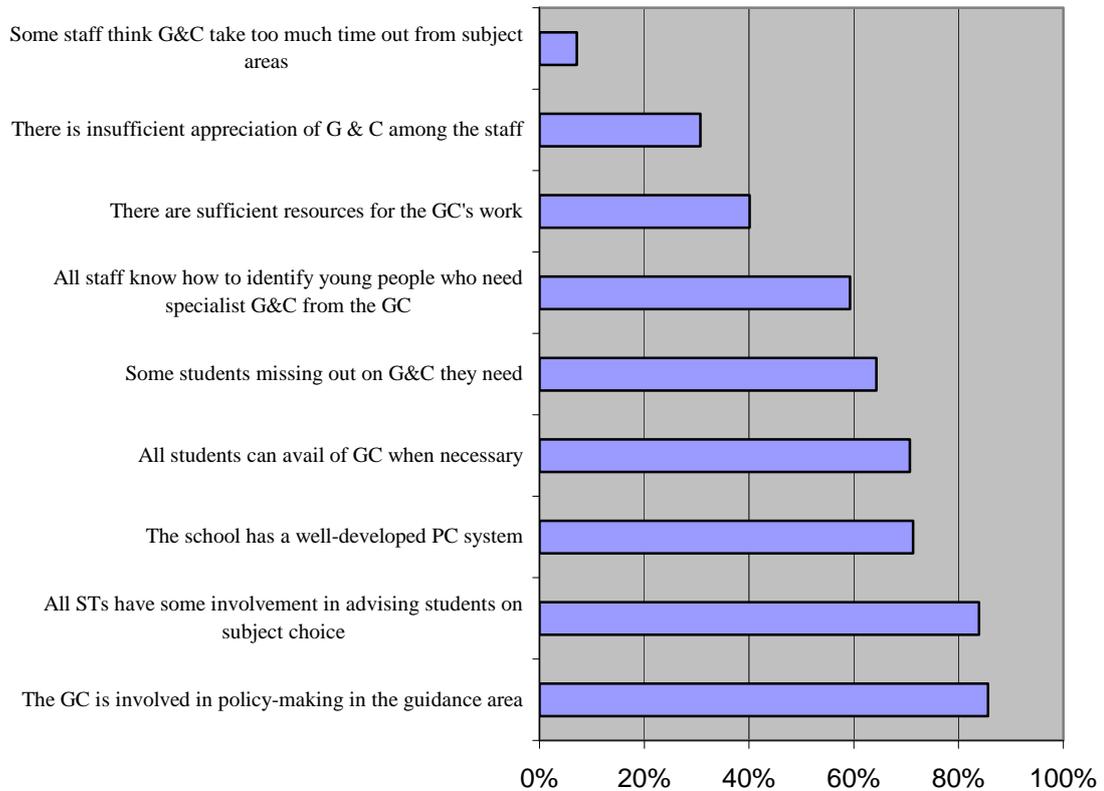
Principals' opinions on the attitudes and capabilities of students in the school

Principals were broadly satisfied with the level of preparation of students for college and job application: the vast majority of principals agreed with the statements 'students have a good idea how to apply for college' and 'students have a good idea how to apply for jobs'. The majority of principals (65 per cent) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement 'students have low aspirations when it comes to thinking about college'.

Principals' views regarding resources, guidance services and staff views

Principals were asked the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements relating to the resources for guidance, the guidance services and the views of staff concerning guidance (Figure 7). A significant proportion (65 per cent) of principals agreed that there were some students that are missing out on guidance and counselling that they need. Also, almost a third agreed that there is insufficient appreciation of guidance and counselling among the staff. Principals of vocational schools were somewhat more likely than those in secondary or community/comprehensive schools to feel that students are missing out on guidance. In addition, principals in community/comprehensive schools were most likely, and those in vocational schools least likely, to agree that the school has a well-developed pastoral care programme.

Figure 7: Views of principals regarding resources, guidance services and staff views (% agree/agree strongly)



The developments principals would like to see in guidance education provision

The most important provision principals wanted to see in place in their school was that there would be more guidance hours or an improved guidance ratio. This issue was mentioned in 63 per cent of cases. The need for (greater) counselling was also mentioned in 13 per cent of cases.

Reflecting on more general national guidance services, the most important provision that principals would like to see is the same provision they wanted to see in their schools, more guidance hours or an improved guidance ratio (mentioned in 39 per cent of cases). Counselling was again mentioned in 12 per cent of cases. Other provisions mentioned included support from external agencies (8 per cent), more resources (8 per cent), training and in-service (6 per cent), and to have a guidance plan (3 per cent).

1.3 Guidance Counsellors' Perspectives on Guidance Services

General Support Structures

Eighty-three per cent of guidance counsellors surveyed reported having a pastoral care programme for their students. Guidance counsellors in schools that have a pastoral care programme are significantly more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied with the support structures for students in their school. The majority (69 per cent) of guidance counsellors in schools with a pastoral care programme are (very) satisfied compared to only a third in schools without a pastoral care programme.

The three main approaches taken to pastoral care were Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) (mentioned by 42 per cent), a Class Tutor system (33 per cent) or a Year Head system (28 per cent). When asked which staff members were involved in running the programme, Guidance Counsellors were the staff members most likely to be mentioned (29 per cent). Year Heads and Class Tutors were also mentioned frequently (28 per cent).

Satisfaction with support structures

Generally guidance counsellors were satisfied or very satisfied (63 per cent) with the support structures, although guidance counsellors in community/comprehensive schools were significantly more satisfied, as were guidance counsellors in fee-paying secondary schools. Guidance counsellors in boys' secondary schools were least likely to state that they were satisfied with support structures in the school. Guidance counsellors in schools that were taking part in the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI) were on average more satisfied with the support systems for students in their school.

Liaison with Outside Services/Agencies

Again contact with the NEPS was almost universal, while almost three-quarters indicated that they liaised with social workers, and half had liaised with the National Education Welfare Board (School Attendance Officer). Over half (55 per cent)

liaised with juvenile liaison officers or the Gardaí, almost half with Youthreach and 35 per cent with Youth Workers.

Some variations by school type and size were apparent, while designated disadvantaged schools were significantly more likely to liaise with NEPS, the National Education Welfare Board, social workers, Youthreach, youth-workers and juvenile liaison officers/Gardaí than non-designated disadvantaged status schools. Schools taking part in the GEI were also more likely to liaise with the National Education Welfare Board, Youthreach, youth workers and juvenile liaison officers/Gardaí.

Guidance Provision

Two-thirds of guidance counsellors in the survey were female and just under half were full-time guidance counsellors and a third described themselves as teachers with guidance hours. Because of differences in average school size, the secondary and vocational sectors are more reliant on part-time guidance counsellors and teachers with guidance hours than the community/comprehensive sector. Overall 81 per cent had a permanent whole-time appointment in the school, with those in the secondary sector somewhat more likely to be employed on a part-time basis than those in the other school types. Female guidance counsellors were more likely to be employed on a part-time basis than their male counterparts.

In total 83 per cent described themselves as qualified guidance counsellors. Just over half (52%) of those who described themselves as “teachers with guidance hours” similarly described themselves as qualified guidance counsellors. A quarter of those who were not qualified were currently undertaking a guidance/counselling-related course. While all guidance counsellors in community/comprehensive schools were qualified, the figure was 84 per cent in secondary schools and 73 per cent in vocational schools. Larger schools also had on average a higher percentage of qualified guidance counsellors.

In terms of teaching commitments, three-quarters of guidance counsellors engaged in teaching, with more than a third spending the bulk of their time (more than 12 hours per week) on subject teaching. If attention is confined to non-guidance related teaching, six out of ten guidance counsellors have some subject teaching as part of their workload. The majority who had teaching commitments found it difficult to balance time between their teaching and guidance commitments. Guidance counsellors in GEI schools were less likely to report having teaching commitments, while those in smaller schools had greater teaching hours (Table 2), as expected given the system of allocation. Among all guidance counsellors (whether teaching or not), an alarming four-fifths reported that their current time allocation is not sufficient for their guidance-related activities and had to use non-guidance time for some tasks.

Figure 8: Number of hours teaching among guidance counsellors with teaching commitments

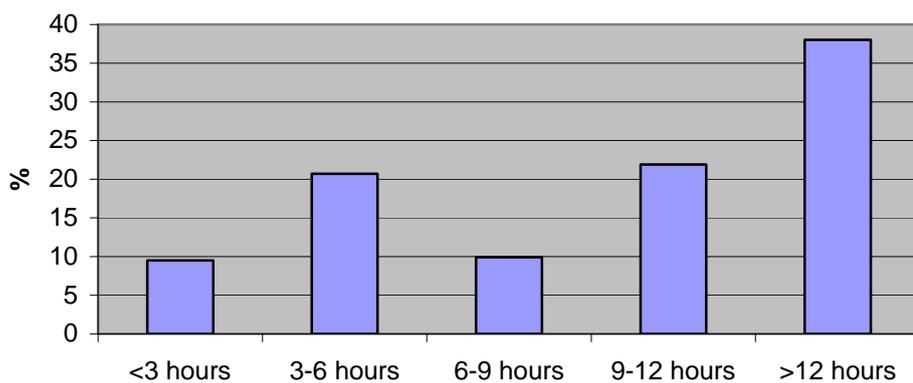


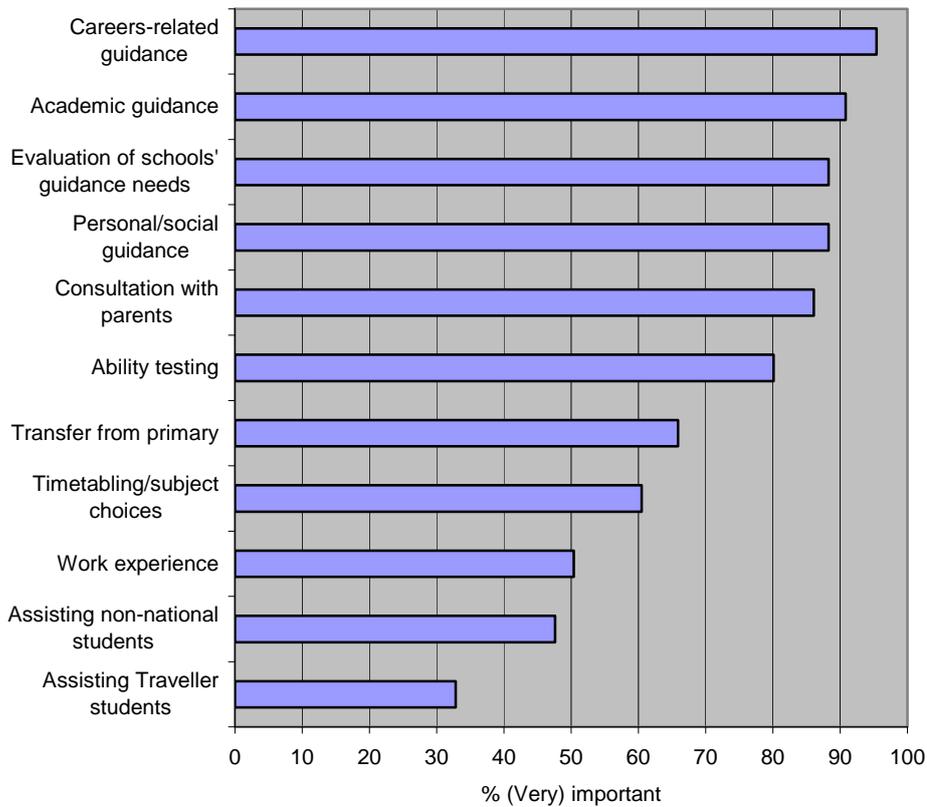
Table 2: Weekly hours spent teaching subjects by school size

School Size	Mean Hours Teaching
Less than 250 students	13.1
250-499 students	9.5
500-799 students	8.6
800+ students	6.1
Average hours teaching for all schools	9.7

Guidance Counsellor involvement in range of activities

In line with the views of principals, providing careers guidance was the key activity of guidance counsellors, followed by academic guidance and personal and social guidance, all mentioned by the vast majority of guidance counsellors (Figure 9). Evaluating the school’s guidance needs, consultation with parents and ability testing were also widely cited. Activities which guidance counsellors were less likely to consider being an important component of their workload were dealing with work experience, assisting non-nationals and assisting students from Traveller families. In terms of the most important activity in relation to their role as Guidance Counsellor, providing careers related advice was mentioned most frequently, followed by personal and social guidance and academic guidance.

Figure 9: Main activities of guidance counsellors



Working with individuals in different year groups

Leaving Certificate classes and Junior Certificate classes were the two main groups that guidance counsellors reported working with. In terms of the proportion of time spent with the different year groups, a total of 45 per cent of the guidance counsellor's time is spent with Leaving Cert Established students, 10 per cent with Junior Cert students, 12 per cent with LCVP students, 10 per cent with Transition Year students, 8 per cent with LCA students, 6 per cent with First Years, 4 per cent with PLC students, 1 per cent with adult classes and 2 per cent with other student groups. Guidance counsellors in community/comprehensive schools, larger schools, schools with designated disadvantaged status and those taking part in GEI tend to spend relatively more of their time on first year and Junior Certificate students than those in other school types.

Proportion of time spent on broad guidance areas

Guidance counsellors in all types of schools spent most of their time on careers related guidance (45 per cent, see Figure 10). They spent almost a quarter of their time on personal guidance, a fifth on academic guidance and over a tenth on other activities such as administration and meetings with staff. In terms of school type variation, those in community/comprehensive schools tended to spend somewhat less time on academic guidance and more time on personal guidance than those in secondary or vocational schools. Guidance counsellors in designated disadvantaged schools spent significantly less time on average on careers guidance and significantly more time on personal guidance and other activities than those in non-designated disadvantaged schools (Figure 11). The proportion of time spent on personal guidance varies significantly by size of school with guidance counsellors in large schools spending about twice as much of their time on counselling than those in small schools. In addition, guidance counsellors in GEI schools spend a greater proportion of their time on personal guidance.

Figure 10: Proportion of time spent on broad guidance areas

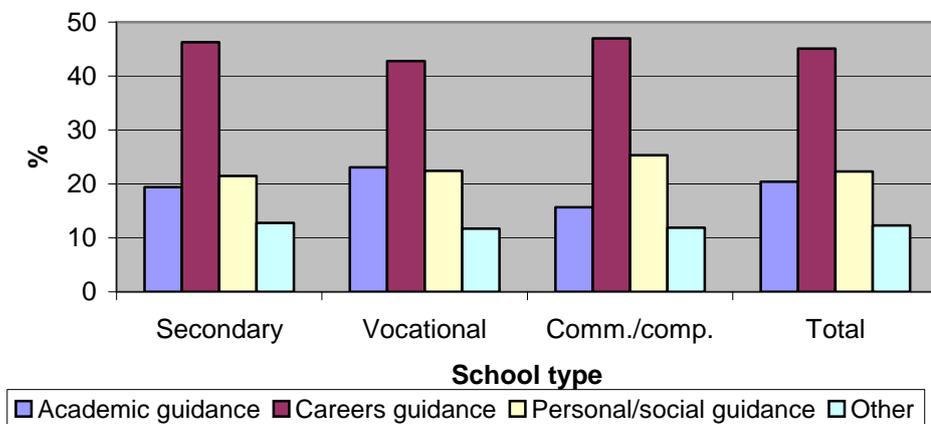
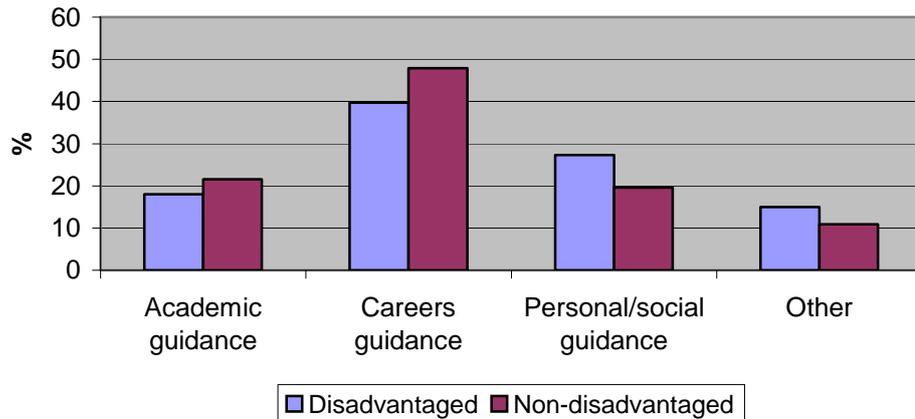


Figure 11: Time allocation on guidance areas by designated disadvantaged status



Satisfaction with Guidance Provision

Guidance counsellors' opinions on the attitudes and capabilities of students in the school

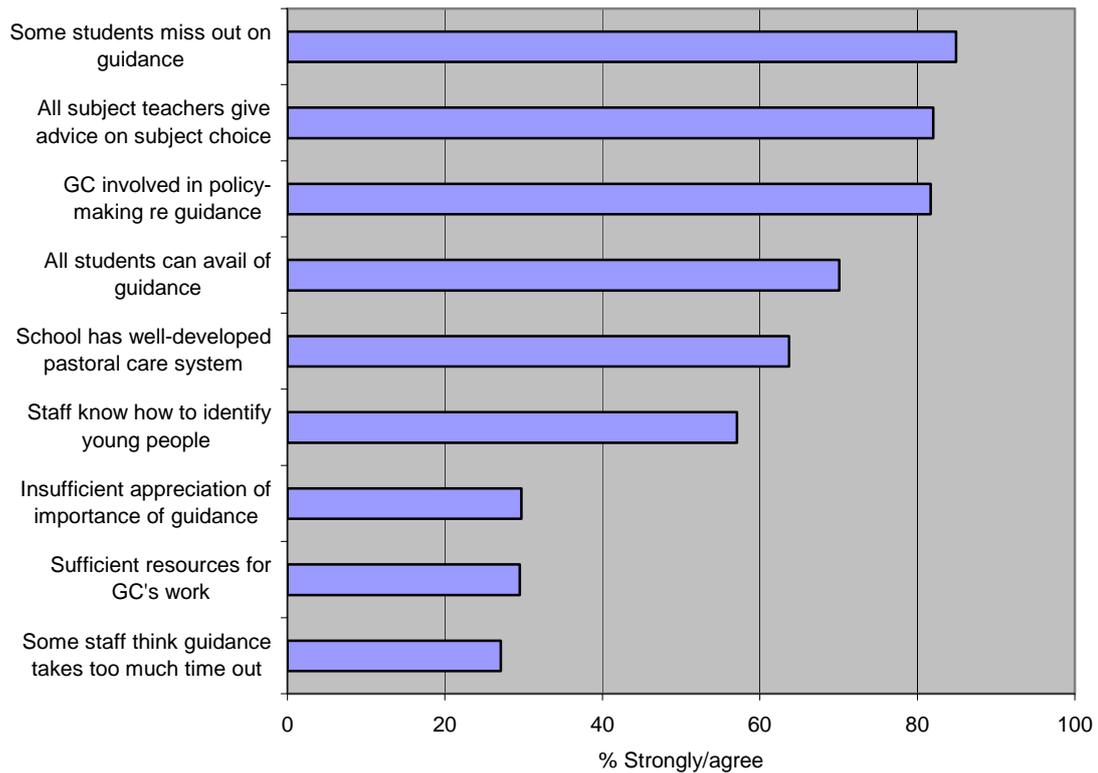
The vast majority of guidance counsellors feel that 'students have a good idea how to apply for college', while three-quarters hold that 'students have a good idea how to apply for jobs'. Furthermore, the majority of guidance counsellors disagree with the statement 'students have low aspirations when it comes to thinking about their future'. Those in GEI schools and designated disadvantaged schools were more likely to feel that their students had low aspirations when it comes to thinking about their future.

Guidance counsellors' views regarding resources, guidance services and staff views

Guidance counsellors' perceptions of the adequacy of guidance provision revealed some important shortcomings (Figure 12): the vast majority (85 per cent) felt that there were some students that are missing out on guidance and counselling that they need, even when such services were, in theory, available at school. In addition, less than a third felt that there were sufficient resources for the guidance counsellor's work in the school. On a more positive front, the majority felt they were involved in policy-making in the guidance area, and that that their school had a well-developed pastoral

care system. Again GEI schools illustrated a more whole school approach with these guidance counsellors more likely to feel 'all staff know how to identify young people who need specialist guidance and advice from the school's guidance counsellor'.

Figure 12: Views of guidance counsellors regarding resources, guidance services and staff views

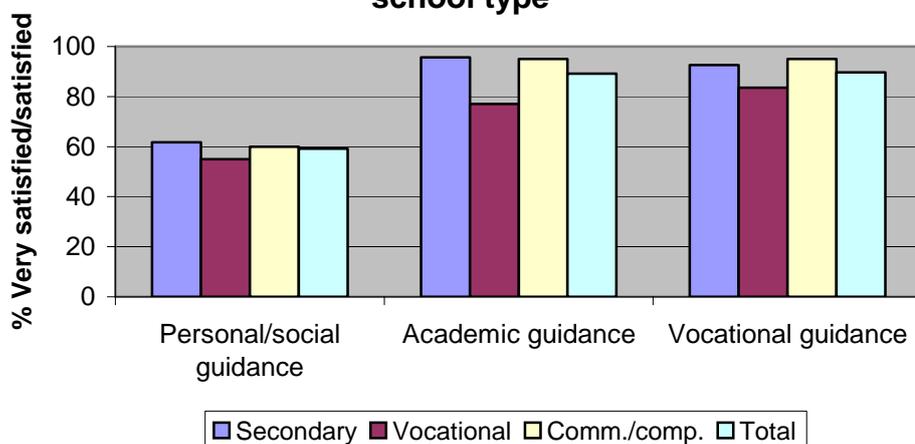


Satisfaction with guidance services

Generally, guidance counsellors were satisfied or very satisfied with the guidance services their school was able to provide. Approximately ninety per cent were satisfied with vocational and careers guidance and with academic guidance in the school. Guidance counsellors were not as satisfied with personal/social guidance and counselling (59 per cent), indicating a gap between the perceived adequacy of careers/academic guidance being provided to students and the level of social/personal support being offered.

Across schools those in vocational schools were significantly less satisfied with academic guidance than those in secondary or community schools (Figure 13). Those in small schools were also on average less satisfied with academic guidance compared to larger schools and schools with fewer than 400 students were less satisfied with personal guidance. Those in schools designated disadvantaged were somewhat more satisfied than those in non-designated disadvantaged schools with personal guidance in their school as were those in GEI schools and fee-paying secondary schools.

Figure 13: Satisfaction with guidance services by school type



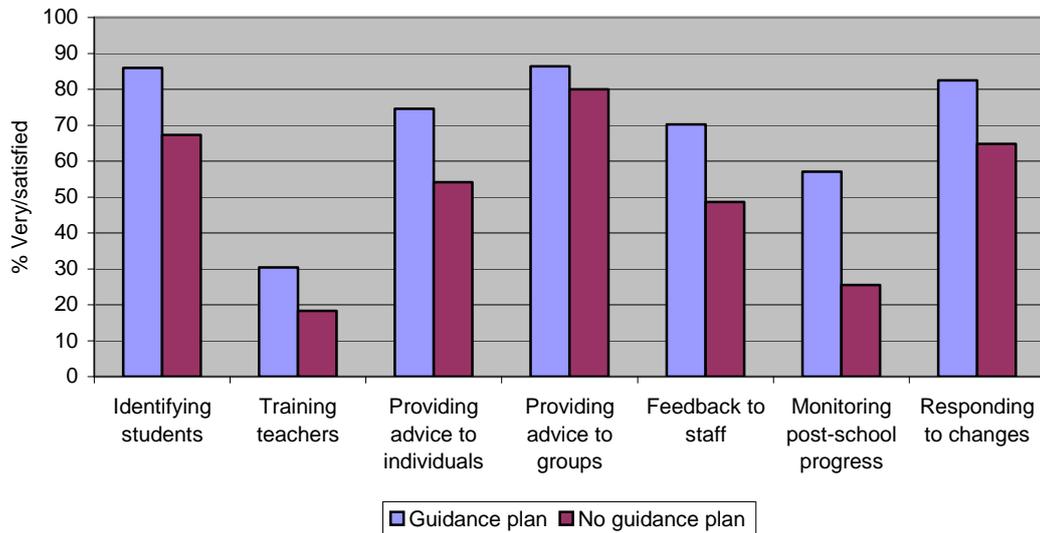
Written Guidance Plan

Two-thirds of guidance counsellors reported that their school had no written guidance plan. Fee-paying secondary schools and GEI schools are significantly more likely on average to have a written guidance plan.

Interestingly, having a written guidance plan in place in the schools is associated with higher satisfaction levels with personal guidance, academic guidance and careers guidance. With the exception to the provision of specialist advice and guidance to groups of young people, having a written guidance plan is also significantly associated with higher satisfaction with provision in specific guidance areas, such as providing feedback to staff, monitoring the post-school progress of

students, identifying students in need of specialist advice and providing training for teachers in identifying young people who need specialist advice (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Satisfaction with specific guidance areas by guidance plan



Professional Development and Training

Just over half of guidance counsellors reported that they had received guidance related training in the last twelve months. Those in vocational schools were somewhat less likely to have received such training, as were those in smaller schools. Where guidance counsellors took part in training, the most frequently attended courses were Institute of Guidance Counsellors in-service courses, training in a specific counselling technique and computer/other IT courses.

Overwhelmingly, 91 per cent of guidance counsellors stated that they would be interested in further guidance-related training. Those working in larger schools were more likely to say they would be interested in further training, although the majority across all sizes of schools expressed such an interest. When asked about the kinds of areas they would be interested in, interest was greatest in relation to counselling, student assessment and testing and computer/IT courses.

When guidance counsellors were asked how easy they found it to participate in available guidance-related training, the majority (62 per cent) said that it is sometimes difficult to find time to attend courses. Over a fifth said they can always attend courses and 16 per cent said they could never find time to attend courses. Those with teaching commitments found it more difficult to find the time to attend courses.

1.4 Summary and Conclusions

Given the discretionary nature of guidance resources, it is not surprising that guidance provision varies quite considerably across schools as does the nature of the guidance counsellor's role, with variation in the nature and extent of the guidance counsellor's role in personal and social support most particularly. Satisfaction levels with guidance provision in vocational, academic and personal domains correspondingly varies across schools, with GEI schools in particular reporting greater levels of satisfaction in personal and social support. Overall, guidance counsellors were less satisfied with provision in the area of personal and social guidance and counselling.

Perceptions of guidance resources were somewhat critical, with widespread concerns over students missing out on the guidance and counselling they need. In addition, guidance counsellors reported difficulties in juggling their teaching and guidance responsibilities. A predominant focus on senior cycle students, particularly Leaving Cert established students, with relative neglect of younger cohorts, was also apparent.

Chapter 5

Strand 3

In-depth case studies in 15 schools selected from
Strand 2 schools

carried out by the

Economic and Social Research Institute



SELINA MCCOY, EMER SMYTH, MERIKE DARMODY AND

ALLISON DUNNE

2.1 Introduction

Information collected as part of the postal survey was used to identify schools with varying levels and types of guidance provision. These schools form the focus for case-study research in phase two of the study. Case-studies have been completed in fifteen schools. In-depth interviews with principals, deputy principals, guidance counsellors and other personnel involved in a pastoral care function were undertaken within the schools. Interviews with key personnel were supplemented with group interviews with Junior and Leaving Cert students within the schools. These case-studies allow for the provision of a detailed picture of the operation of guidance services on the ground within schools serving different groups of students. They crucially also present the perspective of the student: their views on the kinds of guidance and counselling services they have received and their observations on improvements that might be needed.

The 15 case study schools were selected to represent a number of dimensions of guidance provision, as well as more structural features of schools. There were two main aspects of guidance provision which informed the selection:

1. *Level of guidance provision*: both the number of guidance counsellors and the hours allocated to guidance were considered.
2. *Breadth of activities* of guidance counsellor: the number of areas where the guidance counsellor felt they played an important role.

In addition, the selection also ensured the inclusion of schools participating in the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI): in total 2 of the 15 schools participate in the GEI, with different levels of GEI allocation of guidance resources for the two schools.

Schools were also selected to ensure a good mix of schools according to four main criteria:

1. School type and gender
2. School size (closely related to level of provision)
3. Regional location
4. Designated disadvantaged status

On the basis of these criteria, the following schools were selected:

SCH NO	Type	Size	Designated Disadvantaged
LOW GUIDANCE PROVISION, LOW RANGE OF ACTIVITIES			
1	Girls' secondary	Small-med	No
2	Girls' secondary	Med	No
LOW GUIDANCE PROVISION, HIGH RANGE OF ACTIVITIES			
3	Coed Secondary	Large	No
4	Vocational	Med	Yes
5	Community/comprehensive	Small	No
MEDIUM GUIDANCE PROVISION, MEDIUM RANGE OF ACTIVITIES			
6	<i>Community/comprehensive</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Yes</i>
7	Private Coed Secondary	Med	No
8	Girls' Secondary	Med-large	No
9	Boys' Secondary	Small	Yes
HIGH GUIDANCE PROVISION, HIGH RANGE OF ACTIVITIES			
10	<i>Vocational</i>	<i>Med</i>	<i>Yes</i>
11	Community/comprehensive	Med-large	Yes
12	Coed Secondary	Large	No
HIGH GUIDANCE PROVISION, LOW RANGE OF ACTIVITIES			
13	Boys' Secondary	Med-Large	No
14	Community/Comprehensive	Large	No
15	Vocational	Med	No

Note: Italic type indicates GEI schools

This chapter gives an overview of some of the key findings from the case study phase of the project. The chapter focuses on four main areas:

1. Key personnel views of the strengths of the guidance services in their schools
2. Key personnel views of the weaknesses of the guidance services in their schools
3. Key personnel views of the priorities for the future development of guidance in their schools
4. Student perspectives on guidance

2.2 Strengths of Guidance and Support Services for Students

The section commences with an examination of some of the key issues emerging in evaluations of guidance and support services for students, as judged by key school personnel. This section reviews two central areas emerging across the schools:

1. Human resources
2. Career guidance and preparation

1. Human Resources

Virtually all of the 15 case study schools placed strong emphasis on the dedication and hard work of their guidance counsellors and teachers performing guidance duties in enabling the provision of comprehensive guidance services to their students. Despite strong concerns over the level of resources devoted to this sector (as discussed below), many of the schools cited the key role played by their guidance counsellors in students' lives and decisions and the fact that this role was often undertaken outside of the regular school hours and often at the voluntary initiative of the guidance counsellor. Several schools alluded to such dedication in the work of guidance counsellors, as illustrated in the following remarks:

'Because she gives so much time over her allocated time its strong. If she was somebody who came along and said 9 hours cut-off, it wouldn't work. Its her ability, her initiative'. (Principal, School 10)

Interviewer: What do you see as the main strengths of the guidance and counselling services in your school?

Deputy Principal: The commitment to the pupils. There is tremendous commitment .. a very good working relationship between pupils and staff. (School 7)

Some of the praise of guidance counsellors' work related to their relationships with students, both in terms of their approachability and accessibility/open door policies in a number of schools. In one school this was reflected in the level of demand by students to see her:

'She is absolutely snowed under all the time, people want to make appointments and talk to her, which I think is a real indication that the job is being well done'. (Deputy Principal, School 3)

In many schools the fact that such a key support person is easily accessed by students is seen as a vital part of student life and an integral part of the guidance counsellor's role:

'The main strengths are students now have somebody who can take them aside for 40 minutes and give them 100% attention. That is the main strength. I feel students show huge emotion when they realise somebody is actually listening'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 4)

'... availability of the person [main GC], provision for every child to be treated equally and no one to say well she will only see or only has time for .. you often hear this, people might only spend time with high flyers'. (Guidance Counsellor No 2, School 10)

'I think we provide a very good support system to the students ... the fact that a student will ring you up and say can he come back to you even 2 or 3 years later, I think you must have made a lasting impression.. and also the fact that they'll offer to get involved in a careers day and they like it so I think that speaks enough'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 14)

2. Career Guidance and Preparation

In the vast majority of the case study schools key personnel were broadly satisfied with the career guidance students were receiving, and a number of the schools considered this area the main strength in evaluating their guidance services. Such guidance largely related to the areas of CAO advice, advice regarding what colleges and courses to pursue and advice regarding post-school educational options.

‘It provides a very adequate level of guidance with regards to careers, aptitudes and abilities’. (Principal, School 7)

‘The main strength .. is that the students are provided with the information they need to make decisions. And they are supported in making those decisions and the parents are kept involved’. (Guidance Counsellor, School 13)

‘I would certainly see the main strengths as being the vocational guidance ... because there's such a gap of knowledge among parents and guardians about the opportunities that are available for people in terms of third level education, in terms of going into college, in terms of careers or in terms of student needs, that is hugely important that there is some pointers available for them’. (Guidance Counsellor, School 9)

In many ways this reflects the predominant focus on ‘careers’ across almost all of the case study schools, particularly career guidance for 5th and 6th year groups. This appears to reflect a priority given to careers within a very limited time allowance, as well as reflecting the demands of students, and parents, for such guidance.

‘Well my main responsibility is to ensure everybody gets proper career information ... that is quite important to the school and to the parents. That they would be able to face the leaving cert, CAO and changing to 3rd level’.

(Guidance Counsellor, School 13)

‘The counselling area which I have a lot of interest in sort of gets pushed down very much because a lot of students want to deal with what they want to do so the emphasis would be very much on making sure that they all would be aware of what is going on where, that they're well briefed, that they can present themselves, that applications forms are looked after carefully’. (Guidance Counsellor, School 14)

‘Primarily I am in a one-to-one role facilitating students doing research on careers. I’m really addressing any questions, issues, helping them with paper work with the CAO and so forth’. (Guidance Counsellor, School 15)

In many schools this focus on ‘careers’ and a ‘culture of careers’ is seen as having a positive impact on students’ career preparation. School personnel had largely positive views of both students’ level of preparedness for progressing to further education after school and the rate of progression to further and higher education. Firstly, many of the schools expressed satisfaction with the rate of progression to further study:

‘I don’t have the statistics but the vast majority would go on to further studies’. (Principal, School 12)

‘Traditionally we had a good rate of students going to all faculties and colleges’. (Guidance Counsellor, School 13)

Secondly, the majority felt that students were also academically well prepared for progressing to further study.

‘I would think that the students are very well prepared for getting into whatever course they choose to get into’. (Deputy Principal, School 3)

‘The colleges are always very pleased and very willing to send down people to promote their college and to talk about them and very often they say about how well prepared students have been that they have got in from here’. (Principal, School 14)

However, a number of schools alluded to the different learning styles between second and third level systems and the difficulties this created for students, an issue which is discussed further below.

2.3 Weaknesses of Guidance and Support Services for Students

Again deriving from interviews with key personnel across the case study schools a number of areas were prominent in evaluating the guidance services in their school. These included:

1. Resources
2. Inadequate Guidance at Junior Cycle
3. External support structures
4. Student Preparedness on a personal/social level

1. Resources

Just one of the 15 case study schools expressed any sense of satisfaction with the level of resources for Guidance.

Interviewer: Do you think the school has sufficient resources for guidance and counselling?

Principal: I never like saying I have sufficient of anything because its so unlike me, the department would be really shocked if they thought I was saying that. You see from the point of view of guidance at the moment I think yes [we have sufficient resources]. (School 15)

In each of the other schools concerns around the level of resources were expressed, sometimes on quite a strongly worded basis.

‘Certainly as principal when I make an application for resources just to get blanket no is, I find it discouraging’. (Principal, School 13)

There was also strong criticism of the system of allocation of resources and the inflexibility of the quota system.

‘We have another trained counsellor on the staff but because we’re under a certain magical number from the department she can’t operate, I think that’s crazy and its immoral in many ways that we have somebody on the staff who has the skill to deal with the kids and because of the numbers game that we’re playing with the department we can’t offer that service’. (Chaplain, School 14)

Some schools expressed dissatisfaction with the need to draw on resources from other sources to fulfil guidance needs:

'I think to have to take from our teacher allocation, a half teacher equivalent to provide a full-time Guidance Counsellor for our students isn't the way'.

(Principal, School 6)

Ultimately, the shortcomings in resources were invariably reflected in the time allocation for Guidance:

Interviewer: What is the main weakness with the guidance services in your school?

Principal: Simply a lack of time for the whole area of guidance. (School 7)

'We don't get to every student, we look at the list at the end of every school year or during it and say we have seen her 4 times and she has missed 3 appointments or you know, we just don't get to see everybody. I do feel guilty'.

(Guidance Counsellor No. 1, School 8)

While a strong focus on careers and vocational guidance was seen as a key strength in many of the schools, the corollary of this is a perceived neglect of the more student support/counselling aspect of the Guidance Counsellor's role. With limitations in time and resources many schools and guidance counsellors felt they were unable to offer an adequate personal support and counselling role to their students.

'... even our guidance counsellors they will have so much training but then when it comes to the actual allocation of time, the careers end of things will sap a lot of that'.

(Pastoral Care Co-ordinator, School 1)

'Not enough time, certain students not getting time. ... Lack of counselling, pure counselling time'. (Principal, School 4)

'I would see a weakness possibly in the counselling area, that I can't sufficiently address. It needs to be addressed now'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 13)

'We are managing guidance, the career guidance, I would say well at the senior cycle. But we are not taking the juniors as much. And then trying to combine

counselling with that as well it would be impossible. I don't think one person should do all of that in a school'. (Principal, School 12)

'Without calculating, I would feel we certainly need a counsellor separate. We should have a person with counselling skills' ... 'If we had a room where the pupils can go where they can sit down calmly or chat or go with their pals .. the pupils need that. They need a person to talk to. But they have nobody'. (Principal, School 12)

In line with a perceived short-fall in guidance resources, some personnel also maintained that there was insufficient time for planning and interaction among staff regarding guidance and counselling issues.

'I think some of the kids do suffer in silence because we're not, maybe a lack of communication, being passed, .. if the time was there for tutors and myself and year heads to meet for half an hour and to say so and so is having difficulty, so and so's granny has died, there's a separation .. communicating stuff that we need to know about kids and that tends to fall down'. (Chaplain, School 14)

Others pointed to the difficulties in balancing a guidance role with that of a teaching role and argued for the need for a full-time guidance allocation in all schools.

'It should be a full-time position. When you are moving from guidance to teaching your mind is too disjointed, you have too many things in your head and with careers the goal posts keep moving, you are inundated with literature, then of course there are new courses cropping up all the time. I think it's a full-time job'.

(Guidance Counsellor, School 2)

2. External Support Structures

Many schools drew attention to inadequacies in the supports offered to schools, particularly relating to the services of NEPS and the health boards/social services.

Many of the concerns related to the level of financial support available to the support services. In relation to the operations of the NEPS, there were widespread concerns

over the lack of funding and the consequently lengthy waiting lists and lack of response to perceived needs.

'I would like to see more easier access to outside services. Like psychological services. They are ferociously stretched in the Department of Education'. (Principal, School 1)

Interviewer: So would you think the support services are adequate?

Guidance Counsellor No 2: No, NEPS no way. Not at all. It's quite frustrating. While there has been an improvement its only slight. And one of the most frustrating things, the Dept of Education won't accept data from the school, they need everything to be very precise, through assessment and we are waiting months for an assessor and the school is given a certain allocation and if something more urgent crops up one of the children already on the list has to be demoted to make way for that child. Its just not good enough. (School 10)

'first of all NEPS is very unsatisfactory, completely a waste of time, just don't have enough personnel'. (Principal, School 11)

Similar concerns related to the support offered by the social services and particularly their level of resources.

'I think what is frustrating for a lot of people is the lack of response... Social workers do their best, I wouldn't criticise them, I know the psychiatric services are overburdened, people will put them on waiting lists, they mightn't be seen for months. I know I had a situation a few years ago where a child was in desperate need of ... special counselling and she was put on the waiting list and for the duration of the 2 years she was here she never got counselling'.

(Guidance Counsellor No.1, School 10)

'...more or less what social services are asking us [is] how much we can do for them rather than what they can do for us, I'm not blaming them, they don't have the bloody personnel but its very frustrating from that point of view, the real work that could be done, preventative work that could be done, its outside our scope'.

(Principal, School 11)

Some key personnel also expressed a great difficulty in accessing and identifying the relevant personnel in the support services.

‘I would like an improvement on the existing services and for them to be more visible. I would like them to network with us, make contact with us, let us know who they are, where they are, how we contact them. And even to establish some kind of relationship with them’. (Guidance Counsellor No.2, School 8)

‘There doesn't seem to be much link between the schools and social services like that, there is very little interaction until there is a problem’.

(Deputy Principal, School 15)

The issue of resource allocation and the perceived inflexibility of the system of allocation of resources emerged again.

‘I think as I said before I would like the access to a psychologist, to be more numerous and more accessible. Equally, we had two suicides last year, and one very recent past pupil, at that time I know the local educational psychologist did come up and did do some counselling but ... because she had been here for two days that that time was then taken away from testing, our allocation of time there. ... which seems to me to be madness. Because the fact those students needed counselling did not mean we didn't have students who needed to be assessed’.

(Deputy Principal, School 3)

Given the difficulties in accessing such support services many of the schools indicated students and schools were being forced to rely on private provision, particularly in the area of counselling.

‘In recent times now the psychological services have come in, we have had tests and they give recommendations. But the reality is that some kids unless they can pay won't be able to get it. And the vast majority of parents can't pay’.

(Principal, School 4).

‘there is an increasing reliance on private provision of counselling, etc. Especially with regards to where exemptions are sought in exams, it's now almost the norm to

get a private psychologist report. So much as it has become the norm the Department has now for some years have been simply accepting these reports. Whereas previously they didn't accept them, it had to be a Department psychologist' (*sic*). (Principal, School 7)

3. Inadequate Guidance at Junior Cycle

With the exception of one of the GEI schools (which was using the additional resources to offer guidance services at Junior Cycle), virtually all of the case study schools expressed concern over the level of guidance being offered to Junior Cycle students. This has important implications for subject and programme choice at senior cycle, as well as developing more general abilities such as decision-making skills and the ability to source information, as well as identifying areas of interest at an earlier age.

'I think that the junior certificates should be introduced to career guidance and I think there should be a greater understanding of what career guidance is for students'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 5)

'I think the junior students need more guidance'. (Guidance Counsellor No. 2, School 8)

'The lack of any service for the 3rd years' [is the main weakness]. (Principal, School 5)

[If given additional resources] 'I would begin by providing service to 3rd year; there is a major deficiency there'. (Principal, School 5)

'If I had the time I'd like to be more involved with the junior cycle but I just feel that if I try to do that in a big way other areas of the senior cycle would suffer'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 9)

4. Student preparedness on personal/social level

Interviews also examined the views of staff on the extent to which they felt students were prepared for leaving school: in terms of academic, personal and social preparedness. In many of the interviews issues around the personal and social maturity of students emerged, as well as concerns over the different teaching and learning styles typically operating at second and third level.

Interviewer: Are there any areas where you feel students might be better prepared?

Deputy Principal: I suppose the non-academic; we have pushed them to the leaving. ... That is a huge need, a social preparation. (School 12)

Many comments related to the social and emotional maturity of students and the extent to which they had the skills to enter into more independent living arrangements.

Interviewer: Are there any areas where you feel students might be better prepared?

Principal: I suppose the area of acting independently, you know. That they can live without the vigilance of their teachers. Like that you are operating on other people's responsibility rather than your own, we could work on that. I suppose just life coping skills you know we could be doing more in the area of self esteem and independent thinking. (School 12)

'I would love to see the students with a bit more practical preparation for being out on their own, even in terms of you know, just the whole nutrition, living off a budget and taking care of their nutrition, particularly if they are going somewhere where they are not going to be going home every weekend as well, you know'.

(School 15)

'Academically they are probably more able than they were. But their maturity isn't matching it'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 3)

'I think they could be better prepared and I think it's a criticism of all schools. There is probably too much school time when they are in the secondary system with the result that some of them find the freedom of 3rd level that they can't cope. Because

they have been so supervised and monitored and advised at 2nd level that some of them certainly can't cope with 3rd level and the freedom they have there'. (School 7)

The change in learning style from teacher-directed to more self-directed learning in third level was seen as an important issue which faced students progressing to third level and one which schools were not addressing.

Interviewer: Are there any areas where you feel students might be better prepared?

Guidance Counsellor: Maybe better to study on their own without, the secondary system has a lot of teacher input, maybe an old fashioned word of spoon feeding and I find when they move away from that even with my own children they found that difficult. So maybe more responsibility for their own study at school. Maybe more responsibility in the system. (School 2)

'So there is no emphasis on the self learning. That is a huge shock when they get to college The emphasis would have to be taken from the directed learning. It's more personal development than just sitting down at a desk and absorbing the stuff. Their critical thinking skills aren't there'. (School 2)

However, schools varied in their perceptions of students' maturity and personal/social readiness for leaving school. A number of schools identified the availability of the Transition Year programme as a key determinant of such readiness:

'The Transition Year makes a huge difference, they are more mature...but Transition Year the difference is extraordinary...they are more rooted in where they are going'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 3)

'I find the pupils who have come through the Transition Year much more focused and seem to have more coping skills, I am not saying that about all students but my observations would be and my findings would be the majority. Perhaps because they are a year older, perhaps they have had an experience to develop themselves somewhat in the Transition Year program through interacting with each other and maybe at a different level with the teachers'. (Guidance Counsellor, School 2)

Interviewer: Would you think the students are well prepared for going to further study?

Principal: I think they are because they have been in the Transition Year. Without the Transition Year I don't think they would be well prepared. They would be too young, and I think they would probably be choosing subjects in 5th year on a haphazard basis on what someone else told them rather than an informed choice. That is what I think the big advantage of Transition Year is they can make an objective decision about subjects they wish to study rather than getting it wrong. (School 7)

While differences between Leaving Certificate Applied and regular Leaving Certificate students were also noted in a number of schools:

Interviewer: In terms of preparation for life after school do you think there's a difference [between Leaving Cert and LCA students]?

Deputy Principal: The LCA prepares them a bit better for work, they do work experience one day a week and a lot of those do a job...some of them will do the same work on Wednesday afternoon because it's a half day and on Saturday, so they're well into the life of work...some students actually do an apprenticeship at the same time and manage to do it. So yes they would be better prepared for life afterwards, the level of study, the level even when they're doing it is much easier than the regular leaving certificates, there's no comparison. (School 11)

Interviewer: How well do you think the school prepares students for further study?

Deputy Principal: I would say in general that it's no different to other schools, I mean you do your best to promote independent thinking and working on your own. I think the fact that the school has LCVP is a big advantage because there is a certain amount there for vocational preparation, it's practical. But I think the LCVP would be an advantage to those in terms of thinking on their own feet and realising this is my piece of work, I am responsible, I have to go away and do this and I have to come back with it. Because there is a different approach too, a different learning style. (Deputy Principal, School 15)

Interviewer: Would you say there is a variation between the Leaving Cert Applied and regular Leaving Cert groups?

Principal: The LCA group is far more prepared for the interview situation, interacting with adults, knowledge of the work place. They would be interacting with managerial people within the work place, they would definitely be far better prepared, that would be very much part of the process they go through as part of the course. Whereas, the LCE would be more book focused, study focused and the ability to develop those interpersonal skills to a degree falls short because of the academic element. (School 15)

Where schools felt students were socially and emotionally prepared for leaving school it appears programmes such as the Transition Year and Leaving Cert Applied played a central role in such preparation. An emphasis on preparedness did not appear to occupy a more general position in the schools, but rather was an area that many schools felt was largely neglected.

2.4 Priorities for the Future

1. Resources

Almost all schools expressed a need for additional resources for guidance and counselling.

‘I think every school should be allocated a full guidance teacher regardless of the size’. (Principal, School 15)

‘Allocate more career guidance counsellors. More people to the area, I think years and years ago there was one allocation per 150 (*sic*), which we would need 3 then at that rate. And at a time when counselling is just as important, the need for counselling would not have been anything like it is now’. (Deputy Principal, School 3)

And a number suggested that there should be greater targeting of additional resources in favour of certain schools:

'I firmly believe that schools that are deemed disadvantaged we need a full-time Guidance Counsellor outside of the allocation. Purely to give all of the kids access, they all need access'. (Principal, School 4)

'On a national level the big difficulty that I see happening in terms of guidance ... is people are inclined to feel that if any initiative that comes out it has to be mainstreamed, in other words you can't have a guidance counsellor all to yourself because everybody will want one. .. I think there should be some positive discrimination .. in favour of schools that have proven that because of their location and so on that there are greater needs within them'. (Principal, School 9)

2. Greater focus on Junior Cycle

The issue of guidance at Junior Cycle and the difficulties schools encountered in finding time or resources to offer such guidance emerged frequently. There was also a recognition in many of the case study schools that such guidance needs to be incorporated in future guidance services.

'That you would target the junior school in career guidance. And that a programme would be put in place that a child would be aware from 1st year on that decisions are going to be made about her life even if she doesn't make them but she is aware of the consequences of subject choices'. (Deputy Principal, School 2)

'If I got additional resources targeting the 1st and 2nd years for subject choice and skills, working to schedules, that type of thing'. (Deputy Principal, School 4)

'My vision would be that they come in 1st year and we have regular meetings with them and they know the child and the parents. Where the child wants to go. So that you are not only getting to them in 5th year'. (Principal, School 10)

3. Greater provision of counselling/personal support for students

The case study schools varied widely in the role played by guidance counsellors in personal/social support and counselling for students and in the staffing and resources targeted at this area. A number of schools employed trained psychotherapists to visit

the school on a regular basis to counsel students; others availed of third level counselling students who sought work placements; while others referred all students perceived to be in need of such support to outside state or private services.

A large number of the case study schools did express a need for further attention in this area and an issue which the schools needed to address more adequately in the future.

‘If I got additional resources, the counselling side. Counselling for students’. (Deputy Principal, School 4)

This was seen as a particular need for those schools that do not have a chaplain:

‘I would feel we certainly need a counsellor separate. We should have a person with counselling skills ...we don't have a chaplain’. (Principal, School 12)

‘Counselling would be a big problem, there is a huge need for that. You could have a full-time person here every day, 7 days a week. I think the problem is counselling. Especially in a school like this where you don't even get full time, you don't get a full time guidance counsellor. It's only a half post’. (Deputy Principal, School 1)

‘I would say that we would focus on the careers and on the counselling, the need seems to grow exponentially from year to year. I think that is true of society not just us, their parents who are alcoholics, people they know who have committed suicide, it just seems to get worse and worse’. (Deputy Principal, School 3)

Interviewer: What would you see as the main priority for the future development of guidance counselling in your school?

Deputy Principal: More of the counselling. (School 4)

Interviewer: What would be the main priorities for the future?

Guidance Counsellor: Development of the counselling role ... if you ask any teacher, teaching has become more stressful, pupils are facing more problems in their own lives and these are coming out in the classroom. (School 7)

But allied to greater provision of counselling/personal support for students, a number of guidance counsellors commented on the need for supervision and comprehensive training to fulfil this role professionally.

‘there is a lot more counselling issues coming up and I think Guidance Counsellors need personal support as in professional support as a Guidance Counsellor for the issues that they have to deal with. That would be one thing that would be a must and I think it should be allocated and paid for by the department’.

(Guidance Counsellor, School 10)

2.5 Student Perspectives

The case-study schools differed in their provision for junior cycle students both in terms of advice on the choice of Junior Certificate subjects and in relation to selecting Leaving Certificate programmes and subjects. Only one of the schools (school 13) had a highly structured approach with students being given classes in third year to help with their subject choices. In other cases, students were given a formal talk by the guidance counsellor (or other personnel) on the available options and/or were given aptitude tests to help them to choose the appropriate subjects. However, in three of the case-study schools, students reported that they were given little or no formal guidance in choosing their senior cycle subjects.

With the exception of the school in which a structured programme was provided, students generally felt they had been given too little guidance in choosing subjects. Concerns related to the lack of information on the content of specific courses and the lack of information on the implications of taking particular senior cycle subjects for access to third-level courses:

‘I just wrote down whatever, history, I did history in third year, it's completely different in fifth year, there's loads of writing and I hate it now, I used to love it in third year’. (LCE/LCVP students, School 14)

‘Because you don't know what you are picking. Like in third year you are not worried what college you are going to but the subjects you pick might be the wrong ones’.

‘I don't know, it's kind of left up to yourself in third year and then you are stuck with the choices in subjects you made’.

‘Yeah I wanted to do art so in second year I had to pick art or French so I picked art because I was better at art and I thought that is what I wanted to do but I have changed now and if I wanted to go to college I would need French more, you need a language for college’. (LCE students, School 10)

As with provision at junior cycle level, the case-study schools varied in the nature of guidance provision at senior cycle. In just over half (eight) of the case-study schools, Leaving Certificate students had a regular class, usually once weekly, with the guidance counsellor, often supplemented by individual appointments. One school had occasional classes supplemented by an appointment system and two of the case-study schools had an appointment-based system. In four of the case-study schools, the nature of guidance provision depended on the Leaving Certificate programme taken by students. The dominant focus of classes and meetings with the guidance counsellor was on providing information and guidance on (applying for) third-level courses.

Students were fairly evenly divided between those who expressed qualified satisfaction with existing provision and those who were generally dissatisfied. Students who were satisfied with existing provision stressed the value of career exhibitions and visiting speakers along with the approachability of the guidance counsellor:

‘If you want advice the Guidance Counsellor is always there like, you can have a word with her, she always has time for you’. (LCA students, School 6)

However, students expressed a number of concerns relating to existing guidance provision. Firstly, some students were dissatisfied with the amount of time spent on guidance and the consequent difficulty in securing individual appointments with the guidance counsellor:

‘Like I had one idea in my head all the time but I wasn't sure, I wanted to see what else was there like, not just the one thing. But it was hard like to get talking to the Guidance Counsellor one-to-one. It's hard because she has other classes. You can only meet with her once a week and then it's only for about twenty minutes, if you are lucky’. (LCE students, School 2)

Secondly, a number of students were dissatisfied with the advice they had received on subject choice, mainly because they had not chosen the subjects they needed for the third-level courses they would like to do. Thirdly, a number of students were dissatisfied with the information they had received on available courses and careers

and felt that guidance was focused on a relatively narrow range of course and career options:

‘I think ... it's preferred that you do a course on the CAO. They want everyone to go to CAO courses. PLC is like last resort. A lot of people are quite happy with PLC, or even FAS courses, we are not told about them at all. I don't think FAS courses are hardly mentioned. Like you could do a FAS course but then they go straight back to CAO’. (LCE students, School 8)

Some criticism also centred on the personality of the guidance counsellor in terms of their lack of approachability and/or being overly directive.

Where students expressed a preference relating to the nature of provision, they tended to prefer one-to-one rather than class-based sessions:

‘You definitely do learn more one-to-one’.

‘When you are in a class you are all there in a class and you just don't get anything from it. Then if they concentrate on one [topic] you don't get any time’.

‘If they gave us more individual attention they would be able to give better direction but because there are so many of us she doesn't know us personally. Not like the way your English or your Maths teacher knows you and your strengths, she wouldn't like have an idea’. (LCE students, School 8)

Suggestions for the future development of guidance provision focused on more time being allocated to guidance. More information on different courses and career options along with the need for guidance an earlier stage were also mentioned.

2.6 Summary and conclusions

The analysis raises some important issues regarding the guidance services operating in second-level schools. There is widespread satisfaction with the level of commitment and dedication of guidance counsellors. However, this does raise issues over success being contingent on the commitment and personality of the guidance counsellor. This is particularly important in the context of serious concerns over the level of resourcing of guidance services and the difficulties this is creating on the

ground. Such difficulties are reflected in the time allowed for guidance activities, the extent to which this allows adequate guidance across all year groups and comprehensiveness in terms of a broad career and counselling remit. Also the difficulties in combining teaching and guidance roles are noted.

The second main issue emerging is the focus of guidance services and school ethos more generally. In many schools, owing partly to student and parent demand, guidance is largely confined to career preparation and progression to further study (and often quite narrowly defined in terms of CAO applications and third level college/course selection, rather than other post-school educational, training and labour market choices). More general issues of social and emotional preparedness for life beyond school are largely neglected and any work that is done in this area is related to participation in programmes such as Transition Year and the Leaving Cert Applied, rather than being a more central aspect of guidance and support services in schools.

Chapter 6

Strand 4

Focus Group Interviews with Stakeholders

commissioned by the

National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE)

carried out by

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1. RESEARCH STRUCTURE

1.1 *RESEARCH BACKGROUND: FOCUS GROUPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS*

The aim of Strand 4 was to obtain views on post-primary guidance services from parents and pupils associated with a range of post-primary school types along with other parties who had a direct/indirect role in education/careers (e.g. representatives from primary schools, third level institutions, FAS¹⁹, Access programmes²⁰, businesses). It was requested that approximately 60 participants take part in a series of once-off, two hour long, focus groups around the country. It was envisaged that the groups would address the following questions directly or indirectly through the discussions:

1. What are your expectations of guidance at post-primary level?
2. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of guidance at post-primary level?
3. What should guidance at post-primary level provide for students in the 21st century?
4. In what ways do you see yourself contributing to the guidance programme in the post-primary school?

The researcher co-ordinated and facilitated the groups and compiled the report.

1.2 *FOCUS GROUP CONTEXT*

- Pilot groups were held initially to explore the format and membership balance most suitable for generating responses to the key questions outlined above²¹.

¹⁹ FÁS : Foras Áiseanna Saothair, the National Training and Employment Authority

²⁰ Access programmes : Programmes to support individuals from disadvantaged circumstances to proceed to third-level education

²¹ 20 people representing a range of stakeholders from the 4 provinces took part in Dublin locations.

- Information about the focus group location and participants is provided in general terms in recognition of the confidentiality agreement reached in the groups²².
- Seven focus groups were held in Education Centres across the country (North, South, East, West, the Midlands). Specific locations were selected in order that representatives from the range of post-primary school types would be represented within rural and urban dimensions.
- In order to maximise the likelihood of attendance from a range of stakeholders, each group was held at a different time and/or day.
- Invitations were issued with the aim of obtaining a wide representation on a local and national level while keeping the numbers in each group low. In instances where individuals were unable to attend, every effort was made to replace them with others who could represent the same school type/group/organisation. At the core of each group (average size = 8 people) were students, parents, representatives from education/training settings and the business community (apart from one setting where representatives from a core group did not attend on the day).

1.3 FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Fifty-seven people took part in the seven focus groups. Participants represented a wide range of different links with education/careers and/or types of education settings:

- Students - at different stages of the post-primary Senior Cycle²³
 - undergraduates and postgraduates who obtained college places through traditional routes immediately after school as well as those who returned to education as mature students

²²Some participants were sensitive to the fact that they were one of a very small number of individuals in an area to hold a particular role.

²³ Post-primary junior cycle students were not involved in the seven focus groups. When invited to take part in the pilot groups, some junior cycle students had indicated they were not interested in attending or were too busy (e.g. with mock Junior Certificate examinations). The feedback from those that attended was groups should focus on “*older students*” because, for example, their experience of guidance was so limited and/or that they were “*not really thinking about those kind of things*”. These views resonate with the views expressed by both the senior cycle students and parents in the seven focus groups (See Section 2.6).

through a variety of programmes

- Parents - with children attending a full range of post-primary schools whose own education took place in / outside of Ireland
- School types - vocational, community, voluntary sector, fee-paying
- Schools offering different programmes e.g. with/without Transition Year / Leaving Certificate Applied course/Post Leaving Certificate courses/ Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
- School with different gender mixes i.e. single sex, mixed gender
- Primary schools
- Education services for members of the travelling community
- Education-related services for early school leavers
- Access programmes
- FÁS
- Third-level institutions e.g. colleges, institutes of technology, universities
- Businesses with and without direct links to education

The specific numbers within each category are not provided because many individuals were represented in more than one category and drew on a range of personal and professional experiences in the group discussions (e.g. a parent of post-primary students who was a primary school teacher, an ex-business person currently in third-level education).

1.4 FOCUS GROUP STRUCTURE

The group facilitator introduced herself and the background to the study as well as the rationale for and format of the focus groups. Issues of consent, confidentiality and researcher independence were discussed. Permission to tape the discussion was obtained and ground rules agreed. It was stressed that individual not group views were being sought and that individuals did not have to justify their views or experiences nor was the group required to reach a consensus on the topics raised. Participants were provided with paper and pens for their use. The four main questions were outlined (See Section 1.1). Individuals were encouraged to take a few

minutes to consider their personal responses to these questions before the group discussion commenced.

The facilitator commenced the discussion in each group by asking question one. Generally the dynamics of the groups were such that relevant discussion appeared to be easily generated with all participants making contributions. On occasion the facilitator clarified local references, encouraged the group to broaden the discussion where the focus appeared to be on one topic and reminded the groups of the key questions. A tea break occurred half way through the discussion. Before the two hour discussion finished, participants were invited to highlight any remaining issues.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS : CAREER GUIDANCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO FINDINGS

Although the make up of each group varied and the discussions were wide-ranging, many common themes emerged. The findings reported reflect issues that arose across many groups. The order of the issues outlined in Section 2 represents the order in which the issues were typically raised by participants. The order is indicative of the nature, timing and stakeholders' perceptions of the guidance input in many schools. The comments from participants also highlight the wider impact of the current education system on guidance counsellors, other school personnel, students and parents. The findings are separated into career guidance (Section 2) and other guidance (Section 3) because of the groups' focus on the former.

Parent and students tended to refer to the year structure in their school. For example, in some schools fifth year is the year in which the Leaving Certificate is taken, in other schools this occurs in 6th year. As the year structures were not consistent across all schools, terms such as final year/Junior Certificate year/Leaving Certificate year have been inserted in places for clarity.

2.2 SERVICE VARIATION

The variation in school guidance provision became apparent immediately in each group as participants gave an overview of their experiences of guidance services. Participants outlined very different experiences across a range of variables (e.g. the extent and timing of service availability, service focus). For example, services / events identified by some students as integral elements of the career guidance service offered annually were tentatively suggested by other students as possibilities for "the ideal world" (e.g. a timetabled guidance class, careers nights, interview skill development). No distinct relationship between the services offered and the type of school emerged across the groups.

Variation within schools was also identified. For example, where two Senior Cycle students from different years in one school attended a group, one student made the comment that “*she [the other student] has a Careers class but I do P.E. instead. I do the LCVP [Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme] so I think they think we cover the same stuff*”.

2.3 SERVICE EXPECTATIONS

Each group’s initial discussion of their understanding of school guidance services focussed on career guidance issues. In most of the groups the facilitator was required to raise the issue of counselling as part of the role as it was not raised by participants. (This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 3.1.) The following comments were typical comments from post-primary students and parents across all groups:

“They [guidance counsellors] are there from first year but concentrate on final year students. Before Christmas they give you the CAO [Central Applications Office]²⁴ forms, then after Christmas it is straight into the CAO [i.e. filling out the form.]”

Leaving Certificate student

“I have never thought of a counselling bit before...I know I used the words ‘guidance counsellor’ but really I am thinking career guidance.” Third-level student

2.4 SERVICE EXPERIENCES

2.4.1 Guidance counsellor contact

Almost all students (second and third level) explained that their experience of career guidance services was concentrated in their final year of school. Parents and students discussed their sense of “*limited*” contact because the guidance counsellor(s) was “*rushing to get through*” (i.e. meet with) all the final year students in a relatively short space of time. Some students described having timetabled career guidance classes. These classes occurred at different stages in the senior cycle in different

²⁴ CAO = Central Application Office which processes applications to Irish higher education institutions

schools, usually on a weekly basis, for lengths of time varying from “*a few weeks*” to “*a year*”. While not all students had career classes, all students talked of meeting the guidance counsellor in a one-to-one situation. Meeting times of fifteen or thirty minutes were most frequently cited.

“One-to-one meetings are the key. They are personal, confidential and specific to you.” Post-primary student

While most students highlighted the input received in their final post-primary year, a number of students did describe receiving earlier input. However, some concerns were raised about how the input was structured:

“We pick a career and study it but only if someone else doesn’t want to do it [i.e. explore the same career]. I thought it was a good idea although you didn’t actually have to do the project if you didn’t want to.” Post-primary student who received input in her pre-Leaving Certificate year

“We had a class once a week in Transition year but it was useless apart from work placements and a project on a career.” Post-primary student

2.4.2 Applying for courses

The initial part of the group discussions tended to be dominated by comments about applying for courses. Many students and parents, regardless of school type, immediately referred to applying for courses through the CAO system. Numerous students commented that CAO related information dominated their time with guidance counsellors, regardless of whether they met the counsellor as a group or class “*even when some students were clear that they were not considering this route*”.

While the majority of students talked about the emphasis on the CAO process, there were differences reported in the primary focus of the career guidance available. For example, a third level student who had attended a community school described her experience of guidance in school as follows: “*It was very directed to university and*

college. A lot of boys might have wanted to do a trade". In contrast another third-level, female student who had attended a different community school commented that, in her school, *"the focus was on FAS, trades and PLC²⁵ course, less in term of college"*.

Students who knew what careers they were interested in before meeting the guidance counsellor tended to report different experiences to those who did not know. Students across all groups agreed that help was there for students who wanted to do a well-recognised *"traditional"* course that led to a particular career and commented that *"really these are the students that need the least help"* (Post-primary student). In contrast, others had less straightforward experiences:

"The guidance counsellor told me to do courses with maths or art because they were my strengths. I told her what I wanted to do but she ignored what I said. Maybe she didn't know much about the course or the career." Third level student on course of her choice

"He wanted to do a trade so there were no big questions to be asked when I went to see the guidance counsellor. You would really need to know what you wanted to do to ask the right question because the information isn't forthcoming." Parent

2.4.3 Methods used to learn about career options

Participants reported on a wide range of initiatives that were used or that they would like to see used to help students learn about courses and careers.

All students in their final post-primary year and those in third level institutions noted that written material about many college courses were available to them through the school guidance service. Some students stated that that the full range of college options were not represented or that there was no time for discussion with the guidance counsellor once they had been directed, for example, to a college prospectus. Many students talked about the difficulty in getting *"a real sense"* of the courses from these materials. A third level employee commented that *"colleges are a business. They are selling places. They will glamorise them. The second level student*

²⁵ PLC = Post Leaving Certificate courses

needs to be guided through. Directing them to the printed information that is issued by a college like a prospectus is not enough.”

Many participants identified the under use of computer technology in guidance provision. One student in the pilot study referred to ‘Qualifax’, a database of courses. No student in the main study referred to using such a product. A number of participants talked about being unsure why relevant technology that they knew existed in the school was not used. Others highlighted the difficulty in accessing the technology at the appropriate time (e.g. problems with the availability of networked computers at the time of the guidance class) and the need to use the internet in their own time:

“It is left to you really. I went home to the Internet. It is easier for me than trying to sift through pages of paper. What happens to the students who don’t have the Internet at home or who are not interested ?” Leaving Certificate student

Parents and students were very positive about events that enabled them to meet people directly involved in courses or careers. Some students and parents recalled “careers nights” or classes where people came in to speak about a range of career paths and their day-to-day course / work activities. They indicated that they had the opportunity to ask questions which they found particularly helpful. It was noted that parents were not usually invited to the talks during the school day. These events were not organised in all schools. In one school, the careers night was a venture organised by the school’s parents association and guidance counsellor.

One access officer outlined the benefits of enabling individuals to “*shadow third-level students on courses*” before completing, for example, the CAO form. She commented that after shadowing “*we have found that 85% of the students say that they no longer want to do the course. But if we ask them if they would have put it down as first choice on the CAO form they say yes!*”

2.4.4 Psychometric and other assessments

Students and parents had mixed views regarding the use of tools such as aptitude and interest assessments where they completed them as part of the guidance input. Students seem confused about the rationale for some of the tests and few knew the name of the instruments they completed. However, in contrast, where parents commented on the use of such assessments they tended to be more positive.

“I am very sceptical about those tests. I got abattoir worker as an option. I really did! On some of those questionnaires, people say you can pick your answers to influence the results.” Post-primary student

“Aptitude test results are vital and parents often don’t realise it. The tests give you some guidance about where his strengths lie. I found them invaluable.” Parent

2.4.5 Views about guidance counsellors’ multiple roles

Discussions about the career guidance service were inextricably linked with the issue of the multiple demands on guidance counsellors. This issue was discussed in terms of the consequences for the students (i.e. limited contact) and concerns about the appropriateness of the various role combinations. For example, while students expressed frustration at the brevity of their one-to-one time with the guidance counsellor, they reported understanding *“that the guidance counsellor just had too many students to deal with”*. Comments such as the following were common:

“How can a person switch from being a teacher to being a guidance counsellor and back again? How can they be expected to work out their priorities and do all the bits of the different jobs properly?” Post-primary student

“I don’t think that guidance counsellors should have any hours of teaching...they have no time to plan, to work on different projects, to respond to needs.” Parent

“One gets the impression that they are over-stretched and under-resourced.”

Access officer

“Guidance counsellors are overworked. I don’t know how they keep all the balls in the air. But it is critical that secondary school students get the right information and make informed choices before they get here [to third level].” Third level college employee

2.4.6 Career option biases

Participants raised the issue of bias in different ways across the groups. A number of students raised the issue of guidance counsellor bias in terms of courses as well as course location:

“They [guidance counsellors] are teachers who push careers involving the subjects that they teach.” Post-primary student

“ ... the focus was on TCD or UCD and certainly not college outside Dublin, not even on Maynooth....even though two (school) friends went there because they found courses they liked.” Third-level student who went to a Dublin post-primary school

“She told a lot of us to do the same kind of things. It became a bit of a joke, you know, “Did you get told to do that as well?” Third level student

“I really want to know more about courses and colleges outside the Republic of Ireland...like in England...but our guidance counsellor’s information is limited to colleges here.” Post-primary student

Access programme officers and those involved in back-to-education initiatives talked about perceptions among educators, including but not exclusively guidance counsellors, that concern them. They identified issues relating to the options available and the options highlighted for particular groups of students:

“Although it is not the same everywhere....in some schools people are still told about a certain profession based on their sex or the teacher’s perceptions of them.”

Access officer

“Some teachers still have certain expectations of students because of their social class. Where this occurs, students don’t get all the career information ... stopping higher level subjects in some schools rules out a lot of options for students.” Access officer

“One [guidance] counsellor said that she did not have the “material” for university in her first year [student group]... [although] most [guidance counsellors] are very ready to participate [in access initiatives.]” Access officer

“I was an early school leaver. I had a careers teacher in school...well that’s what we called him. He gave me a leaflet. I was there 10 minutes. We couldn’t afford the course he suggested. I would like to think that things have changed since then but it doesn’t seem as if it has.”

Adult involved in back-to-education initiative

The issue of school principal and/or guidance counsellor bias or lack of knowledge was identified when services offered by FÁS were discussed. As indicated previously, information provided to students about FÁS schemes varied. However, the majority of students from a range of school types indicated that they obtained no *“real information about apprenticeships”*.

A FÁS representative explained that *“some schools invite us annually to talk to the students but some schools never have”*. He commented that *“whole school attitudes to careers die hard”*, giving the example of the principal who stated that *“No students in my school would be interested [in hearing about FÁS]” at a time when I knew that a number of his ex-pupils were on the schemes*”. He also noted that when school personnel have visited FÁS locations they have often stayed *“three times longer than planned”* because of the amount of information available.

One parent expressed concern that once her son, a post-primary student, had identified an interest in a trade, he was not encouraged to explore all his options. She commented that *“it seems to be an unwritten thing... if you want a trade you go to FÁS and you don’t fill out a CAO form. I think it is wrong ... as if doing a trade means that you don’t need career guidance”*.

2.4.7 Subject choices

In discussing the process of applying for courses, one of the issues that arose was the link to subject choices made by the students for the senior cycle programmes. These choices were linked in turn to choices made for the Junior Certificate programmes. Students highlighted the timing of making choices. For example, some students were asked to select their subjects for the senior cycle around the time they were completing their mock examinations for the Junior Certificate. Students talked about not being familiar with the subject syllabi for the Leaving Certificate or not being familiar with which subjects had a different approach in the senior cycle compared to the junior cycle. There were many concerns about not being aware of the career implications of choosing or omitting to choose certain subjects. Many students and parents commented on the consequences of having only a brief link with the guidance service, if any, at this time:

“They [guidance counsellors] go around to the classes when you are in your Junior Certificate year and hand out sheets with the subject choices on them. That’s it really.”

Post-primary student

“I know we pick our subjects early so that the timetable for the next year can be sorted out but you choose subjects before you know where you are going and may discover, as I did, too late that you wiped out a whole set of options because you didn’t know that information.”

Post-primary student

“Yes, career guidance [class] would be considered a doss class [if we have had such a class] but I would have liked it up to Junior Certificate year because I know now that I picked the wrong subjects for what I want to do now.” Post-primary student

“Most often subjects for the Leaving are picked in your Junior Certificate year...you need guidance then. My sister had to apply to a different university [to do the course she wanted] because she was missing a subject.” Third level student

Another frequently mentioned reason for earlier contact was around subject selection for the Junior Certificate. Some post-primary schools require children to make subject choices for the Junior Certificate before they complete primary school. Other schools require students to make these choices at different stages during the Junior

Certificate cycle. Students and parents were clear that they needed more guidance around the content of these subjects, especially where were subjects perceived as “new” or “changed” in focus. Parents were concerned about the factors they should consider when trying to decide if the student might have an aptitude for the subjects. Students and parents expressed considerable anxiety about what the consequences of taking certain subjects or taking them at a particular level (e.g. Ordinary or Higher) in the junior cycle might have on their options for the Leaving Certificate as well as in terms of access to particular college courses.

“Parents came to me and asked me if their child would be good at a subject in secondary school. I don’t know anything about the subjects they were most unsure about... like... what is it... technical graphics. I didn’t feel qualified enough to advise them and not all the secondary schools gave them the information.” Primary school teacher

“My daughter has just started secondary school. She knows nothing about a guidance counsellor. She is making subject choices and is bamboozled. I think they leave it very late.”
Parent

“Going from 1st to 2nd year you drop subjects so you might be closing doors right then. But they do warn you...well maybe they say it once.” Post-primary student

2.5 THE NEED FOR MORE AND ONGOING INPUT AT AN EARLIER STAGE

As participants reflected on their experiences of career guidance services and the nature of the service they would like to see, they were adamant that more input was needed and needed much earlier in the school cycle.

“...from first yearcertainly from Junior Cert year.” Post-primary student

“Should it not be from the start, a build-up process, an information build-up from first year to discuss subjects, colleges and careers,to set your mind thinking ?” Parent

“You need to know someone from first year, know their strengths and weaknesses and personality and establish a relationship with them, be comfortable with them....it is important if they are going to talk to you about the rest of your life.” Parent

“It really helps to focus students in the Senior Cycle when they have a focus and something to aim for. [Behaviour] problems arise when students don’t know where they are going.”

Parent, a post-primary teacher

“My eldest guy is in his final year of school. It is totally new for me. I wouldn’t have a clue [about his after school options] apart from reading the paper. So if it is not going to be a shock to the system I need to find out this information over weeks or maybe months.” Parent

Other reasons for earlier and more in-depth guidance were identified along with the identification of the negative consequences where input is late and/or limited. Participants’ views of potential hidden costs of an underdeveloped service became apparent as they discussed factors such as students’ lack of confidence in the service, disruption to classes and a negative impact on time and resources.

“I repeated [the first year of the senior cycle] because I made the wrong subject choices and I know I am not the only one. There should be more information on subjects going into fourth year.” Leaving Certificate student

“Lots of students chop and change subjects in fourth year when they realise the subjects are not as they imagined.” Student in first year of senior cycle

“If the guidance person doesn’t know you, fifteen minutes before you fill out the CAO form is no good.” Third level student

The increase in both private career guidance services and guidance support in adult services was identified. The issue of post-primary students availing of private career guidance services was mentioned spontaneously by most of the groups (regardless of their urban or rural location). The expense was noted and the unfairness for those who could not afford it was also mentioned.

“She went to see someone privately, that says it all. That’s very common here. It is seen like an extra grind.” Parent

One parent asked a Leaving Certificate student who had availed of this private service what she was offered that she had not been offered in school:

“... more time, more courses and more information about the courses than you will find in a prospectus, the subjects you will study, where it will lead, what you are getting into....he didn't emphasise a college...he knew of some courses I hadn't even seen...they are my highest choices now (on the CAO form) and I wouldn't even have known about them.”

A representative from a back-to-education initiative commented that *“adult services are now providing [the career guidance] the kids should get in schools.”*

Post-primary and third-level students also linked limited career guidance services with the third-level drop-out rate, citing particular individuals' experiences and/or high drop-out rates in particular colleges. One employee of a third-level institution commented that *“the drop-out rate in third-level is a reflection of the lack of career guidance. They [students] sign up for a course but they don't know enough about it”*.

A representative from another type of third level institution noted *“We have information available on every module in every year for every course to help students. We find students often haven't spent as much time researching their third and fourth CAO form choices as they have spent on their first two choices. Then when students are offered choice three or four, they are often surprised at what the course involves which can cause problems”*.

Many participants suggested the *“structured”* use of time in transition year as a possible time to explore careers in more depth making comments such as *“transition year is a good year to think about subjects and explore careers...you don't have too much time after that”*. However, in such discussions a number of points were often highlighted:

- This approach would increase the demands on guidance counsellors.
- Not all schools offer Transition year. Not all students avail of Transition year where it is offered. According to students, one reason some students opted not to undertake Transition year was the fear that *“they might have to do another year anyway, if they had to repeat the Leaving Certificate to get more points”*.

- Given the exam focus in many schools, some students would be more likely to see a careers guidance class as a chance “*to chill and relax*”. Other students might consider it as “*a waste of time*” because it is not an exam subject.

2.6 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents expressed the desire to be more involved in their children’s career guidance and for this involvement to occur sooner in the students’ school experience. Parents talked positively about wanting opportunities to talk to people who have just completed courses as well as those well established in professions. Most parents who met the guidance counsellor face-to-face were positive about such meetings. Interestingly, many parents said they were unsure about how to approach the guidance counsellor or were concerned about how their approach might be perceived by school personnel or their own children.

“We got leaflets and books but I would have loved to have sat down with someone who knew about the options and I know a lot more than a lot of parents about college.”

Parent of post-primary and third-level students

“If I am unsure and feel uncertain about making contact with the guidance counsellor, and I have some experience with the education system through my work, I wonder what it is like for other parents ?” Parent

Groups in rural areas suggested the idea of information nights outside the school environment, run by “*an independent voice that you don’t know, like a guidance counsellor from another area, and who you don’t mind asking...especially about grants and CAO forms.*” Parents in these groups expanded on this idea making comments such as:

“If you had a career guidance person in an accessible office down town funded by the Department... to accommodate all students from the catchment area ... you would not be meeting them everyday in the school, ... parents would be much more comfortable going to see them.”

A key issue identified by parents was their anxiety that they or their children might not have all the relevant information about career options.

“Parents need information as much as students. Sometimes there might only be two information nights available during your child’s time at school.”

“Today’s students grew up with computers. Sending out literature for them to read is not going to work... A lack of information leads to mistakes.”

A high level of anxiety was also expressed about trying to get a sense of the factors influencing their children’s decisions ranging from early subject choices to career choices. There were concerns about whether or not the students were able or interested enough to appreciate the implications of their decisions. The potential impact of the adolescents’ developmental stage was recognised by a number of parents as well as students.

“If first and second years and their parents are told important information early on, the students may not realise the implications but at least the parents have it in their heads and can advise and talk to them.” Parent

“But at thirteen or fourteen you might think “What do I care?”...[your career is] not a priority, you might be blown away by going to the tech [vocational school]. I think parents should be involved.” Post-primary student

“Students think in the short-term. They think as far as the Leaving Certificate or maybe getting to college. This is frustrating to parents who worry that the teenager may not have thought about the reality of the career at the other end....maybe the teenager doesn’t know about all the options and is being influenced by friends when it comes to picking courses. I watched one of my children trying to make career decisions when so much was going on for him at 17 or 18 years of age...he was thinking of course status.... and, of course, what his friends are doing.” Parent

“I did a degree because it was cool to do and then realised that it wasn’t what I wanted to do and then went back to college again.” Third-level student

Access officers also outlined the need to involve parents in career guidance. They commented that parents are likely to have an in-depth knowledge of post-primary students' interests and aptitudes. They expressed concern at guidance counsellor allocation being in relation to school size, suggesting that more guidance hours might be required in areas where parents have little knowledge or experience of post-primary or third level education or have high levels of anxiety about contacting post-primary schools. They also highlighted the need to broaden parents' knowledge, for example, to reduce the tendency of some parents to "*push*" their children towards a course because it leads to a specific profession or career path with which they are familiar.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS: OTHER GUIDANCE PROVISION

3.1 COUNSELLING PROVISION

Most groups had to be asked specifically about the counselling element of the guidance counsellor's role. While many participants expressed confusion or surprise initially when this issue was raised, strong views were then elicited across the groups.

"Well maybe it [counselling] is available in a crisis. But in my experience it isn't equal with careers." Post-primary student

"It [the guidance service] was introduced as career guidance." Post-primary student

"It was all careers, no counselling." Third-level student

A small number of students did indicate that their experience of the services provided by a guidance counsellor included a counselling service. For those whose guidance counsellor was also their teacher, their responses reflected the difficulties this dual role raised for them. Fears of the lack of confidentiality were raised by both those whose guidance counsellor offered such a service and those considering the idea for the first time.

"If you know someone's intimate issues it will undermine the pupil-teacher relationship. The person you talk to [as a counsellor] should not be the person giving you homework."

Third-level student

"I wouldn't have felt it was a confidential forum." Third-level student who had access to a counselling service from a guidance counsellor while in a post-primary school

In addition, issues about accessing the service were mentioned. A third level student recalled one reason why she and her friends were reluctant to avail of the service. Students had *"to go up the stairs [that students had little reason to use] and past the staff room"* to reach the room used for counselling. In the pilot study, one third level student explained that appointments to meet the guidance counsellor for counselling were made through the year head thus *"putting [students] off the idea of meeting her"* because another teacher *"would know"*. Other practical factors such as the lack

of guaranteed privacy once in the room, as well as the room layout and the use of the room for other purposes were also cited as off-putting factors.

When asked to consider the counselling role, the majority of participants were clearly expressing views in response to the request to do so rather than drawing on experience as they had done when discussing the career guidance element. One participant linked the need for counselling with career guidance stating that “*to make a clear career decision, [a student] might need to get rid of [emotional] baggage*”. However, the remaining participants saw the role as separate. In spite of the initial surprise expressed, all participants strongly and repeatedly advocated the need for post-primary students to have access to counselling. Issues such as coping with suicide, substance misuse, family difficulties and bereavements were highlighted as reasons that students might need counselling supports. However, there were very mixed views about how the service should be structured, who should offer it and where it should be offered.

“We had a separate counsellor but even she was torn between being a teacher and a counsellor.” Third-level student

“It is a case of being spread too thinly especially if the person is a teacher as well. How could you do career guidance and counselling well enough and teach?” Parent

“In third level we have separated counselling and careers advice. We see them as two very different roles.” Third-level representative

A number of groups made suggestions such as an independent “*roving*” counsellor who would be available to different schools in an area at particular times of the week and also be contactable by telephone in a crisis. The need for counsellors in primary schools to tackle issues as soon as they arose was also suggested. There was uncertainty about the role of “*religious*” and “*pastoral care programmes*” in providing counselling.

3.2 **SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

Discussions about other potential roles of guidance counsellors generated mixed reactions. Some group participants identified the guidance counsellor as having a key role in supporting students develop a range of *“life skills”*. Other participants identified the need for students to develop such skills but debated about whose responsibility it should be to do so. Suggestions ranged from *“through the school ethos”*, *“naturally through the curriculum”*, *“through those subjects like Social, Personal and Health Education”* to *“outside school”* and *“through the third-level support services”*.

The most common skills that participants agreed the guidance counsellors should be involved in developing were interview skills. While students with very limited experience of guidance services reported no life skills input, at least half the post-primary students had had or knew they would have help in the future to develop interviewing skills.

Students commented that such skills would be required by all students at some time but particularly by *“students who go through the [post- primary] education system but don’t want to go to college and so need to find their own way in the world very soon after leaving school”*. Parents in some groups stressed the need for students to be supported in developing study skills. A small number of post-primary students linked *“a lack of presentation skills”* to the drop-out rate in third level suggesting that some students leave courses rather than face the challenge of making presentations. In contrast, in one group, students focussed on *“survival”* skills which they identified were needed in preparation for living independently, naming such skills as budgeting, dealing with financial institutions, stress management and time management. Many participants mentioned the need for students to have advanced IT skills.

Participants working with students from the travelling community and with students with special needs, whose life circumstances sometimes resulted in unpredictable school attendance, outlined the need to offer direct support around skills such as accessing medical services, reading labels on medicine bottles and knowledge around nutrition.

A number of participants, particularly business people, referred to the importance of communication skills for progressing in the world of work. The need to support students to develop communication skills was also identified by individuals working with vulnerable groups within the education system. A FÁS representative spoke of the need to help students to “*think independently and flexibly*” and to understand the importance of a “*positive attitude*” in the workplace.

Problems finding time to help students with these skills was identified. Transition year was identified as a possible option and again similar issues were raised in response to this suggestion as had been raised previously (See Section 2.5). While a number of participants suggested that some life skills could be taught through pastoral care and exam subjects, it was repeatedly suggested that both teachers and students would react negatively to spending time in exam subject classes on topics that would not be directly assessed in state exams. Concern was expressed by a range of participants about expecting schools, and in particular guidance counsellors, to do too much in this area.

“I’d be concerned about overextending guidance counsellors...let them do the bread and butter stuff.” Third-level representative

“There is an expectation that schools will do everything...they can’t.” Parent

3.3 *TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO POST- PRIMARY SCHOOL*

Students, parents and teachers identified the transition from primary to post-primary school as an area where the guidance counsellor could play a significant role. Discussions relating to the transition were notable for the strength of the responses elicited and the range of reasons, both academic and social, cited:

“I got calls from five or six parents. Their children had had everything going for them in 6th class. Within a few months of being in secondary school, their academic standards dropped, social interaction was nightmare. The children didn’t want to go to school. Parents don’t feel they can raise it with the secondary school because they don’t know them or who to turn to.” Primary school teacher

“Maths in primary doesn’t complement the Junior Cert. I took extra classes to help prepare them.”

Primary school teacher

“Urban areas need more support. Where parents have a choice of schools, they need lots of information about the implications of subject choices as well as the programmes available like the Leaving Cert Applied. Some subjects have changed. I looked at subjects like woodwork that were supposed to be practical. Do people know that now it is all about design not basic skills ? Open days are a great idea if you meet teachers.” Parent

One primary school representative indicated that she prepares students for the move gradually and informally. She explained that she did not identify a need for support from guidance counsellors from post-primary schools and suggested that it might be difficult to integrate such contact into the primary system. She also commented that *“buddy and mentor systems, using properly trained students, could be used”* to help with the transition once the students had arrived in the post-primary setting.

Mixed views were expressed about whether the primary or post-primary system had the *“better”* formal and informal academic and pastoral supports for students. The issue of supporting children with special needs with the transition is discussed in the next section.

The skills that might help the transition from post-primary to third level education were highlighted in Section 3.2. However, it was generally recognised by participants as a *“less traumatic move”*, *“made by adults really”* and *“where there were lots of supports in place”*.

3.4 PROVISION FOR PARTICULAR STUDENTS

The need to support children with special needs in the transition to post-primary school was discussed. Issues about: obtaining parental permission to forward details about children's needs and support they had in primary school; identifying who should have this information in the post-primary setting; anxieties about how this information would be used; and delays in getting support in the post-primary setting were raised.

“When guidance counsellors are dealing with people in the Leaving Certificate year, they are dealing with people who are going to make it through the system ... but what about those who are struggling in primary school, struggling early in secondary school and who leave...identifying this group is not equal to doing something to help them. ” Teacher working with students with special needs in the Primary school

Guidance for non-national students and their families elicited a range of comments. Teachers spoke about the differences in the type of support non-national students needed from a range of school personnel, depending on their language skills and attitudes to education in the context of their personal cultural and gender profiles. One non-national parent spoke of the anxiety she experienced in trying to understand the education system:

“It is hard to understand the system and the associated opportunities. We had a choice of [post-primary] schools for my son. I hope we haven't made a mistake.”

A third-level representative asked if all guidance counsellors were familiar with the range of information now available to guide non-national students in applying for courses (e.g. obtaining recognition for exams taken outside Ireland, arrangements to top-up school qualifications, financial supports such as grants). This representative also highlighted the need for ongoing disability awareness training among guidance counsellors to ensure that students with disabilities were encouraged to explore all their post-school options.

Another group that was identified as potentially benefiting from ongoing guidance provision were members of the Traveller community, particularly students whose parents had little knowledge or experience of post-primary school and limited

literacy skills. It was recognised that supports available for these students in the primary schools were often not available to the same extent in the post-primary schools.

The increasing number of students moving from urban to rural areas in the middle of the academic year, often for economic reasons and/or due to significant changes in the family structure, was highlighted. These students, who had to make substantial academic and social adjustments, were also recognised as a group needing a range of different school supports including guidance provision during the settling-in period.

Participants perceived that *“the more guidance counselling hours available, the greater was chance of helping vulnerable students”*.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS: OTHER ISSUES

4.1 UNDERSTANDING OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS' TRAINING

There was considerable confusion around the training of guidance counsellors. The majority of participants were aware that many guidance counsellors had undertaken specific training although they were unaware of the nature of the training. Three individuals in different groups made comments such as “*people in these roles are perceived as burnt out teachers*”. These particular participants included individuals who were professionally involved in the post-primary education system. Participants expressed concerns about: how guidance counsellors were enabled to remain up-to-date in the field of career guidance; the factors that hindered guidance counsellors from maximising information technology in their role; the extent and nature of their counselling training, particularly in relation to working with an adolescent population; how the guidance courses are reviewed; how the guidance services are monitored; the type of supports available for guidance counsellors; the extent and focus of guidance counsellors' brief; and whether or not more specific guidelines about their role would be helpful. Comments such as the following were typical:

“I thought that years ago there was a programme laid out for career guidance throughout every year from first year but that seems to have unwound over time. Now it seems to depend on the size of the school but does that really make sense?”

Business representative with professional links with the education system

“We need trained and qualified guidance counsellors who are properly resourced, have time to keep up-to-date and who can highlight a full range of options to our children.” Parent

4.2 IMPACT OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM ON ATTITUDES TO GUIDANCE PROVISION

The impact of the wider education system on guidance provision was highlighted directly and indirectly by numerous comments (and briefly referred to earlier e.g. Section 2.5). It was suggested that one result of the “*points system*” to gain entry to third-level education has been to reduce the value of non-exam activities, including guidance provision, “*in the eyes of students and teachers*”. It was suggested by a

number of participants that *“anything seen as “extra” like guidance classes or especially non-career guidance support... even transition year sometimes ... was not taken seriously by some students, parents and teachers”*. In attempting to further explain this *“common attitude”* to non-exam subjects, students and parents talked about general attitudes to the academic programme. One student stated that *“teachers think their job is to get through courses with a view to the exams”*. It was suggested that *“as it is, lots of academic shortcuts are being taken by teachers because of the pressure to finish courses”*. Examples of coursework experiments and projects *“not actually been done by students”* were provided. Parents commented that, *“in such a climate”*, opportunities to develop a wide range of skills through the academic curriculum, *“like debating, social skills and working together”* were being minimised.

Participants expressed concerns that the response to identified student needs in recent years *“was to load the timetable... and to focus on content over skills”*. Business representatives and post-graduate students expressed concern that *“while there is a demand for workers who will be ready to embrace “the knowledge society”, school goers are having less and less opportunities to really develop the supposedly valued knowledge society characteristics of creativity, teamwork and the ability to synthesise and adapt”*.

4.3 *IMPACT OF LOCAL SCHOOL ISSUES ON GUIDANCE PROVISION*

The schools’ guidance service operates within a broader system as indicated in Section 4.2. Participants’ comments also highlighted local variations which may have an impact on guidance provision. For example, the impact of principals’ attitudes was alluded to many times, for example, in informing school policy around subject options.

“The principal allows them to try all the subjects first which gives them a taste. I don’t know how long is long enough! At least it is better than [named a local school] that timetables French one year and German the next...no choice”. Parent

“We did all the subjects, well eleven, for the Junior Certificate because the principal thought it was so important. No other school near me did eleven subjects.”

Third-level student

Variation in knowledge of and attitude to different school programmes was also identified. Students expressed concerns that some initiatives (for example, LCA and LCVP programmes) were regarded as “*second-class options*”. These concerns were expressed by students regardless of whether or not they were availing of these options. Parental confusion about such programmes was apparent. A number of parents in the groups asked students to explain the implications of these programmes to them, including parents with children of the same age as the students, attending the same schools.

4.4 LINK WITH FINDINGS IN THE OTHER STRANDS OF THE REVIEW

Many issues raised in the other three strands of the guidance provision review were also highlighted in this strand²⁶. Themes relating to: the timing, focus and nature of guidance provision; the implications of the guidance counsellors’ multiple roles; and the need for post-primary counselling services were dominant features across the strands. Interestingly while similar concerns were expressed by stakeholders in this strand and school personnel in the other strands, there were considerable differences in descriptions of the reality of current service provision between the two groups on a range of dimensions (e.g. the balance of time spent on career guidance compared to other types of supports).

4.5 PARTICIPANTS’ VIEWS ABOUT INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH

Participants in this strand of the review commented positively about being asked for their views. Such comments were usually made spontaneously during the break or at the end of the discussion. Students identified the value of obtaining views “*directly from [students] who are in secondary school now or through it fairly recently*”. Members from each of the other core groups (parents, other education/training representatives and business representatives) talked about “*being pleased to be asked and pleased to be heard*”. Participants who met in locations perceived as being far from the capital city tended to mention the location of the discussion as a specific positive, for example:

²⁶ Four strands make up the national review of guidance provision. This research is Strand 4.

“What got me out of my bed this morning...and I am not a morning person...was the idea that the Department [of Education and Science] wanted to hear what I had to say down here in [named location].” Parent in a group that met on a Saturday morning

Concerns were expressed about whether or not any “*real*” change would result from the provision of their views as “*it always comes down to resources and money in the end*”. Participants asked that “*the powers that be*” would reflect on the “*extent and cost of the negative consequences*” of limited guidance provision in post-primary schools on a range of education and training settings. At the end of discussions, participants often made comments or asked questions such as the following:

“I wonder if the Department [of Education and Science] would be sensible enough and brave enough to invest in guidance provision even if some of the benefits might take time to be realised”.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Focus group stakeholders expressed their views on a wide-range of issues relating to guidance provision. The themes that emerged are outlined below:

- There is significant variability in guidance provision throughout the country across all dimensions explored.
- Career guidance is perceived by the majority of the focus group stakeholders as the primary role of guidance counsellors.
- Considerable differences exist in the nature of career guidance support in terms of the type, focus and timing of the input.
- The CAO process dominates career guidance input.
- Guidance counsellors' limited hours and multiple roles impact on their availability to support students with subject and course choices. Negative consequences for individual students and the wider education system may result.
- There is a need for all media to be fully utilised in gathering career-related information, particularly information technology.
- Co-ordinated career guidance input throughout the post-primary cycles (and possibly linked to the primary system) is required.
- Parents expressed a desire to be more involved in their children's career guidance.
- In addition to career guidance, there are numerous, other, wide-ranging guidance service expectations among many stakeholders.
- Post-primary students need access to counselling services.
- There are mixed views about the role of guidance counsellors in counselling and life skills development within current school structures.
- There is scope for greater involvement of business representatives in a range of guidance initiatives.
- Confusion about guidance counsellors' remit and training exists.
- Wider issues within the education system are impacting on guidance provision and service perceptions (e.g. the impact of pupil and teacher responses to the "*points system*" and "*timetable loading*" on attitudes to non-exam subjects and life skills development within exam subjects).

- The counselling role of guidance counsellors clearly raises a number of interlinked issues (e.g. multiple roles of guidance counsellors, supports around structuring such a service appropriately) which need to be examined, in depth, on a national level. It is important to recognise that most group participants did not have experience of counselling services provided by guidance counsellors. (Investigation of the full range of reasons underlying this variation in counselling services may provide interesting data.) However, it is significant that, regardless of experience, all participants agreed that post-primary students need access to tailored counselling services staffed by suitably qualified personnel. As students and parents identified significant unmet need in this area, it is recommended that the views of students, parents and school personnel be considered in identifying the possible structures for an appropriate school-linked counselling service(s). When obtaining these views, it also recommended that specific information is sought about potential factors which might hinder the uptake of such services.

Chapter 7

Commentary on Review Findings

This Chapter provides a commentary based on the main findings across the four strands of the review. It begins by briefly outlining the significant developments that have taken place since the research was conducted. Then, the commentary is presented under a range of headings.

Developments since the Guidance Review was conducted (2003-2005)

- A new circular on guidance (Circular PPT 12/05 – Appendix 3) was issued to the management authorities of second level schools by the DES in May 2005. This included a revised schedule of increased ex-quota hours for guidance in the Free Education/Block Grant schemes, with enrolment bands reduced to a common width of 100 students. The need for the provision of increased resources for guidance was raised in all strands of the review, with some principals specifically suggesting that increased allocations should be provided on a sliding scale. Most schools in the Free Education/Block Grant schemes have benefited from the increased allocation of hours set out in the revised schedule. In addition, from September 2006, schools participating in the School Support Programme under Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) will receive an improved allocation based on a ratio of one guidance counsellor to 400 students.
- A document *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance* was issued to all second level schools in September 2005. This document aims to assist schools in the planning of their guidance programme and in meeting their obligation under Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998.
- In April 2004, a National Guidance Forum was established as a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Forum was established in response to emerging

priorities in guidance at both national and international levels. The ultimate aim of the Forum is to establish links between the different providers of guidance services in order to make lifelong and life-wide guidance a reality for individuals. The Forum will complete its programme of work in October 2006 when it will submit a report to the Minister for Education and Science and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is currently drafting a curriculum framework for guidance which will be the subject of consultation in the autumn of 2006.
- The Teacher Education Section of the DES has reached agreement with the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) whereby it has provided funding to make available professional supervision for practicing guidance counsellors in second level schools. This scheme is now in place, coordinated by Monaghan Education Centre and delivered in the education centres around the country.

Allocation of Guidance Resources in Schools

In the review, a majority of schools in the FES reported that they were using fully the ex-quota hours for guidance allocated by the DES for this purpose. Thirty-nine percent (39%) reported allocating additional hours for guidance either from within their own resources or from other sources. However, a substantial minority of schools (11%) reported allocating fewer than the hours received. Sixteen percent (16%) reported having fewer hours than their entitlement. These findings suggest a lack clarity among a high number of school principals in relation to their allocation from the DES for guidance.

Ex-quota hours for guidance are allocated to schools based on the previous year's enrolment numbers and in accordance with either schedule A or B (see Appendices 2 and 3). The principals who reported an incorrect allocation may be unclear as to which schedule applied to their particular schools. As the majority of schools which reported that the allocation from the DES was lower than their entitlement were in the vocational sector (25% of all vocational schools in the survey), it is possible that the Vocational Educational Committees (VECs) concerned may not have distributed the hours they received from the DES for guidance to schools within their schemes in accordance with the schedules. Overall, 20% of vocational schools provided fewer

hours for guidance than their entitlement under schedule A. This points to a need for stricter monitoring by the DES of resources provided for guidance to schools and to VECs. In this context, it is noteworthy that one of the recommendations for Ireland in the OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies is that Ireland should:

Ensure, through a public statement by Government, that guidance resources allocated to schools are used for guidance purposes²⁷.

Guidance Activities and Access for Students to Guidance

According to the findings of the review, most of the time allocated for guidance in schools is being spent providing guidance support to students in senior cycle. Schools included in the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI) were found to be more likely to have developed programmes and strategies to meet the needs of junior cycle students. Of those schools not included in the GEI, a majority (80%) reported spending less than one third of their time with junior cycle students.

The main activity that guidance counsellors undertake with senior cycle students is that of providing one-to-one career counselling and educational guidance. Within this activity, the main concentration is on assisting students with CAO applications and in particular with the Leaving Certificate (established) students. This finding was consistent throughout all of the four strands of the review. In the interviews conducted with students, many raised the issue of the high concentration of guidance time devoted to senior cycle and the particular focus of the guidance programme on the CAO system. A majority of students, past and present, from a range of school types indicated that they obtained no real guidance assistance or information about FÁS trade apprenticeship training, other training programmes or non-CAO further education options, while in school.

In the survey of guidance counsellors in Strand 2, it was found that 45% of their time was spent with the Leaving Certificate (established) students, while only 10% was spent with Junior Certificate students. Notable exceptions to this were schools with disadvantaged status and schools in the GEI where more time was devoted to junior cycle students. Some issues of concern relating to the lack of guidance provision for

²⁷ Ireland, Country Note [section 3.4.3]

junior cycle students were expressed by students and other stakeholders. These related to the need for more support to be made available to students and parents to:

- guide the selection of suitable subject choices and the levels at which subjects should be studied
- inform them about the possible career consequences of choosing (or not choosing) certain subjects in junior and senior cycles
- inform them about the programme options available for senior cycle.

The need to provide for these areas in the guidance programme for junior cycle students is addressed in the guidelines issued to schools in September 2005²⁸. In this regard, it is worthy of note that the OECD (2004) states:

... career guidance also has an important role in addressing the needs of students at risk and early school leavers

and recommends that

*... career guidance is embedded in early intervention programmes*²⁹

It is clear that the case for addressing the imbalance between junior and senior cycle is strong. While one reason is that guidance can have a significant impact on reducing early school leaving, there are others identified in the review by students and parents which are equally compelling.

Support Structures in Schools

A majority of schools (over 80%) had a pastoral care programme available for their students. In general, schools with well developed pastoral care structures reported more satisfaction with the integration of guidance into a range of educational and personal supports being provided for students. In those schools, guidance counsellors were the staff members most likely to be involved in running the programme. In the survey conducted for Strand 2 of the review, guidance counsellors working in GEI schools reported on average greater satisfaction with the support structures operating in their schools while those working in single sex boys' secondary schools reported the least satisfaction. These findings highlight the value,

²⁸ Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance – *DES Inspectorate* (page 14).

²⁹ OECD "Career Guidance and Public Policy – Bridging the Gap"(2004), page 8.

for students and teachers, of well structured and integrated support services for students.

Liaison with NEPS and other support services

Contact with the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS) was almost universal, although many schools drew attention to the lengthy waiting lists for psychological assessments and for services from the (former) health boards. Schools with designated disadvantaged status were significantly more likely to liaise with NEPS. There are students with special needs in most second level schools now and some may require psychological assessments or their school may require the advice of NEPS in meeting their needs. Most schools also have students with social or emotional difficulties that may require specialist intervention. There is a need, therefore, for schools to have adequate access to all appropriate services, particularly in cases where there may be personal risks to students or where they might require support outside of the remit or competence of the guidance counsellor/s or other school personnel.

Profile and Training Needs of Guidance Counsellors

The profile of guidance counsellors working in second level schools highlighted a number of issues. Guidance is increasingly becoming a feminised profession (two thirds are female). Of those who indicated they were the principal guidance providers in their schools, over a third (34%) qualified as a guidance counsellor more than twenty years ago, and a further 18% have no qualification in guidance. When these facts are coupled with the improved allocations of ex-quota guidance hours to schools in 2005, it is clear that there will be an increased demand for initial training places and for on-going continual professional development opportunities in guidance-related areas over the coming years.

The OECD recommended that a common framework for the skills, knowledge and competencies required by all guidance counsellors at all levels and across all sectors be developed³⁰. The National Guidance Forum (NGF) has responded to this recommendation and a sub-committee has been established with the remit of producing a suggested framework of competencies that will be required by guidance

³⁰ OECD - Ireland Country Note (2002)

providers working across all sectors of education, including those operating in second level schools. Such a framework is intended to equip guidance providers with the competencies considered necessary to plan and deliver a comprehensive guidance service to all students, in line with current legislation and policy. When this framework is developed and adopted by the NGF, it will need to be considered by the directors of the initial training courses for guidance counsellors as well as by the Teacher Education Section of the DES in the context of the continuing professional development needs of practising guidance counsellors.

The Role of the Guidance Counsellor

The views of students contrasted with those of principals and guidance counsellors in terms of how the role of the guidance counsellor was perceived. Principals and guidance counsellors considered that personal counselling was a key part of the role of the guidance counsellor and principals considered that individual one-to-one counselling, in particular, was one of the major strengths of the guidance programme. However, students perceived the guidance counsellor's role mainly in terms of providing educational and career guidance support.

Many guidance counsellors are expected to adopt the dual role of being both a teacher and a counsellor in schools. Sixty percent (60%) have a subject teaching role which they combine with that of providing a guidance and counselling support service.

For those students who were aware that personal counselling was available as part of the guidance service, many expressed ambivalence about accessing it due to the difficulties that this dual role (teacher/counsellor) raised for them. The procedures in place in schools for referring students for personal counselling support (for example, through the year head) and the location of the guidance counsellor's office also posed difficulties for some students who stressed the need for privacy. Many also expressed concerns about the issue of confidentiality. In the focus groups, the majority of participants perceived the counselling role as separate from career guidance but all expressed the view that students should have access to personal counselling. However, varying views were expressed as to who should provide it along with how and where it should be delivered. It is clear that the place of personal counselling in our schools in terms of its nature, its accessibility and its

delivery needs to be addressed in the context of the development of guidance services. This will need to take into account schools' obligations under the Education Act 1998, the views of school management, relevant school personnel, parents, students and stakeholders as well as the increasingly complex range of needs presented by second level students.

Teaching Commitments

In Strand 2, it was found that six out of ten guidance counsellors engaged in some subject teaching, with over a third spending more than 12 hours per week on subject teaching. Even in schools with an enrolment in the 500 – 799 category, guidance counsellors spent on average 8.6 hours per week on subject teaching. The majority of those who had teaching hours indicated that they had difficulty balancing time between teaching and guidance commitments.

It was recognised across all strands that guidance counsellors were overstretched in terms of meeting the demands for guidance in the time allocated to them for this work. Principals, across all school types, presented the picture of schools being pushed to the limits of their resources in their efforts to meet the demand for guidance provision and they were strong in their call for more hours for guidance. This call is somewhat difficult to reconcile with the high percentage of guidance counsellors who had substantial teaching commitments since the latter suggests that, in these schools, the ex-quota allocation for guidance is not being fully deployed for guidance.

The Guidance Enhancement Initiative, a model for guidance planning and delivery

The GEI aims to:

- develop and promote links between schools and industry, local agencies and the community
- increase the uptake of science at senior cycle
- increase retention rates/ combat early school leaving.

The success of the GEI, viewed from a number of perspectives, emerged throughout the review. It was found that schools with an extra allocation of guidance hours provided by the GEI:

- had devised more targeted and focused guidance interventions
- had provided more guidance to junior cycle students
- were more likely to have a written guidance plan
- provided more personal support to students
- expressed more satisfaction with the support structures in their schools.

Clearly, the initiative has facilitated the development of many models of good practice in the delivery of guidance.

The review found that having a written guidance plan in place was associated with higher satisfaction levels among guidance counsellors with the guidance service being offered to students. The fact that a high percentage of schools in the review indicated that they had no written guidance plan (over 60%), highlights the need to continue to encourage schools to have a written guidance plan, developed collaboratively at school level, as part of the overall School Plan³¹.

Facilities for guidance in schools and access to ICT

Over 90% of principals reported that their guidance counsellor/s had a dedicated office, computer and internet access. This is a positive finding. However, only a third of principals responded to the question as to whether the school had a dedicated budget for the purchase of guidance resources and services. Of those who responded, almost half reported allocating a budget of less than €500 per annum. The proper equipping of a careers library and the purchase costs of psychometric instruments, personal interest inventories and of other guidance materials, such as computer software for career exploration purposes, requires budgetary planning and a systematic approach at school level. The review suggests that this is an area for development in the majority of schools.

³¹ Guidelines entitled: *Planning a School Guidance Programme*, published by the NCGE, in consultation with DES inspectors of guidance was distributed to all second level schools in 2004.

Inadequate access for students to ICT facilities for guidance purposes in second level schools was highlighted throughout all strands of the review. Students themselves expressed the wish to be able to access accurate and current information using the internet and expressed their concerns about the lack of access to ICT in their schools. Only one student of those who participated in the focus groups referred to Qualifax. In the IGC survey (see Appendix 1), only 21% of guidance counsellors reported that senior cycle students had access to computers for guidance while just 16% reported that all students have such access. The need for access to ICT, for both students and teachers, is paramount for a number of reasons:

- it ensures that students can access the most up-to-date information concerning career and course options
- it supports independent learning and research
- it encourages the development of self-management skills
- it reduces the need for guidance counsellors to maintain up-to-date information on all third level courses and further education and training courses in hard copy.

As part of the school guidance planning process, schools should work towards ensuring that students and staff have regular access, for guidance purposes, to good ICT facilities. Training for guidance counsellors in the use of ICT has been provided under the Schools IT 2000 Initiative and the availability of broadband connectivity to all schools before the end of 2006 should facilitate access to a wide range of education and training websites and data bases.

Guidance for specific groups of students

While students with special needs, non-national students, adult learners and those from the Traveller community do have access to guidance programmes in schools, it was highlighted in the focus groups and in Strand 2 that guidance programmes specifically to meet the needs of these students were underdeveloped. The review also found that the provision of guidance to such students was not considered a priority by a majority of principals, and the involvement of guidance counsellors with them was limited.

As the numbers of students from minority groups in our second level schools steadily increase, schools must focus on responding effectively to their particular guidance needs. Current legislation on equality must also be considered by schools in this regard. The school guidance planning process should include an assessment of the needs of such student groupings. Guidance is a whole school activity and the delivery of guidance to all students should be managed by the guidance counsellor(s) with school management support. The guidelines³² which issued by the DES to all schools in September 2005 provide assistance to schools in planning guidance programmes for specific groups within the school community.

Parental involvement in guidance programmes

In the focus group interviews, parents expressed a desire to be more involved in their children's career guidance and for this involvement to occur sooner in the students' school experience. They also expressed a desire to become better informed about issues such as subject choice, programme options in senior cycle and career options, in order to be in a position to help their children. Many reported being unsure as to how to approach the guidance counsellor and, equally, they were concerned about how their approach might be perceived by school personnel or their own children.

In the guidelines on appropriate guidance³³ parents are identified as having an essential role in the development of the school guidance plan. In addition, their rights to be informed about their children's educational needs and progress should be recognised. They should be involved in decisions about programme and subject options and should be informed about the consequences of particular choices. Parents can also make a worthwhile contribution to the guidance programme of the school through, for example, mock interviews, providing information on their own careers and assisting in the organisation of career events.

³² Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance – *DES Inspectorate 2005*

³³ *Ibid.*

Chapter 8

Issues for further consideration arising from the review

- A substantial percentage of principals reported the ex-quota allocation for guidance received by their schools from the DES as lower than it actually was. This suggests that the attention of the managerial authorities of all second level schools, including the chief executive officers of VECs, needs to be drawn to the schedules given in Circular PPT 12/05.
- The under-utilisation by schools of the ex-quota hours for guidance needs to be addressed. Under the Education Act 1998, all students are entitled to appropriate guidance and schools are required to use their available resources to ensure that students have access to this.
- The imbalance of guidance provision between junior and senior cycle was highlighted across all strands of the review. Since the research was conducted, the need for junior cycle students to have access to guidance was stressed in Circular letter PPT 12/05 *Each school is expected to develop a school guidance plan as part of its School Plan and this plan should include provision for supporting the needs of pupils at junior cycle* and, in the section on *Guidance in Junior Cycle* in the guidelines issued by the DES in September 2005, the importance of guidance in the junior cycle is also emphasised. Also, the inclusion of guidance programmes for junior cycle students in the guidance plan is reported upon in the context of Whole School Evaluations and inspections of guidance.
- Almost 96% of principals indicated that guidance time is spent on the provision of one-to-one careers and educational guidance and information provision at senior cycle. Over 85% reported that one-to-one personal counselling is provided at both junior and senior cycle. These findings were supported by the IGC's survey (see Appendix 1). The nature of the personal counselling was not indicated in either survey. Schools need to evaluate the efficiency of providing information on a one-to-one basis. They also need to examine the nature of the counselling provided on an individual basis in the context of the school's

overall guidance programme and its responsibility to provide guidance for all students.

- Guidance programmes tend to concentrate disproportionately on work with Leaving Certificate students around the CAO process. This is cause for concern particularly since:
 - one of the objectives of guidance is to assist students to develop self-management skills which lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives and students in their final year of school should be capable of accessing information about CAO courses and applying for such courses with minimal assistance from the guidance counsellor
 - students who do not wish to apply for CAO courses are equally entitled to information, advice and guidance about other post-LC options
 - it can contribute to reducing the level of service to junior cycle students.
- The value of well-structured and integrated support services was evident from the review. Such structures typically included a class tutor or year head system with the guidance counsellor being central to the supports provided for students. On the basis of this finding, schools should be encouraged to develop integrated support services that allow a coordinated response to the needs of their students. Such approaches can also contribute to maximising the use made of the resources available to the school, thus giving greater scope to include provision in guidance and/or SPHE programmes for the development of the life skills considered essential to students³⁴.
- The review pointed up the under-use of computer technology in guidance provision. Students were particularly aware of this shortcoming. This finding is corroborated by the IGC survey where only 21% of guidance counsellors reported that their senior cycle students had access to computers for guidance. Students should be facilitated in accessing information on educational and training courses and on careers through the internet. All schools will have broadband connectivity by the end of 2006 under the *Schools Broadband Programme*. The DES also has funded the development of the Qualifax

³⁴ lifeskills as identified by the stakeholders in Strand 4 of the review and in the guidelines issued to schools in September 05 - *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance*

website. Qualifax provides up-to-date information on every course (third level, further education, adult education) in the 32 counties of Ireland. Each course listed has a link to the website of the provider of the course. In the reference library of the website, there are links to approximately 400 education related websites both nationally and internationally. Access to Qualifax and other related websites to research course options should be an intrinsic component of a school's guidance programme. Also, time for students to access computers for this purpose should be factored into the timetable.

- The review raised significant issues around inadequacies in the supports offered by external agencies to schools. These related mainly to difficulties around getting access to some services, for example, psychological assessments. School personnel referred particularly to lack of response from the support services to perceived needs and to lengthy waiting lists, citing inadequate funding and under-staffing as the reasons for the deficiencies in the services. Since long delays can result in schools continuing to work with students who require help of a more specialist nature than they can provide, this is a serious concern. It is clear that there are issues around schools' access to external support services that need to be addressed urgently.
- The dual role of the guidance counsellor as provider of support and as subject teacher was raised across the strands. It is clear from the findings that there is ambiguity around this and there is particular confusion around the guidance counsellor's role in personal counselling. Many students expressed their reluctance to access personal counselling in school for a number of reasons, including issues relating to privacy and confidentiality arising from the dual role of guidance counsellors. Throughout all strands of the review there was unanimity that personal counselling should be available to students, but there were different views expressed as to who should provide this service and where it should be available. Most principals expressed their desire for the expansion of the counselling service in schools and emphasised the need for personal counselling to be available for their students, while parents suggested alternative ways of structuring and delivering a counselling service. The place of personal counselling as part of the guidance service needs to be explored at policy level as well as with the partners and stakeholders.

- The training of future guidance counsellors needs to be considered at policy level in the context of the increasing age profile of the current cohort and the recent improvements in the schedule of hours allocated to schools for guidance. It is likely that there will be an increased demand for places on the initial training courses over the coming years and this will require forward planning.
- The high level of commitment by guidance counsellors to their continuing professional development (CPD) is apparent from the review. Of those surveyed in Strand 2, 91% expressed interest in further guidance-related training. Seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents to the IGC's Professional Profile survey indicated their willingness to attend CPD programmes outside of school hours. The nature and resourcing of future CPD for guidance counsellors needs to be explored by the DES in collaboration with the IGC and other relevant stakeholders.
- The impact and value of the GEI initiative were highlighted throughout the review. These positive findings suggest that models of good practice developed as part of the initiative should be identified and disseminated on a national basis, rather than be lost to the system.
- The low priority given by schools to the development of guidance programmes to meet the specific needs of students from minority groups needs to be addressed at policy level. In addition to the recent increase in the enrolment of non-national students there is also an increase in the numbers of students with special needs, students from the Traveller community and adult learners attending second level schools. All of these learners require guidance programmes tailored to their particular needs. The planning and delivery of such guidance programmes puts additional pressure on the time available for guidance. This review suggests that meeting the needs of minority groups should be a specific consideration for the DES in the future planning for guidance provision in schools.
- While a sizable minority of schools were under-utilising the ex-quota allocation from the DES for guidance, the majority were allocating to guidance the hours received for guidance purposes and in 39% of schools, additional hours were being allocated from other resources. There was a recognition by all

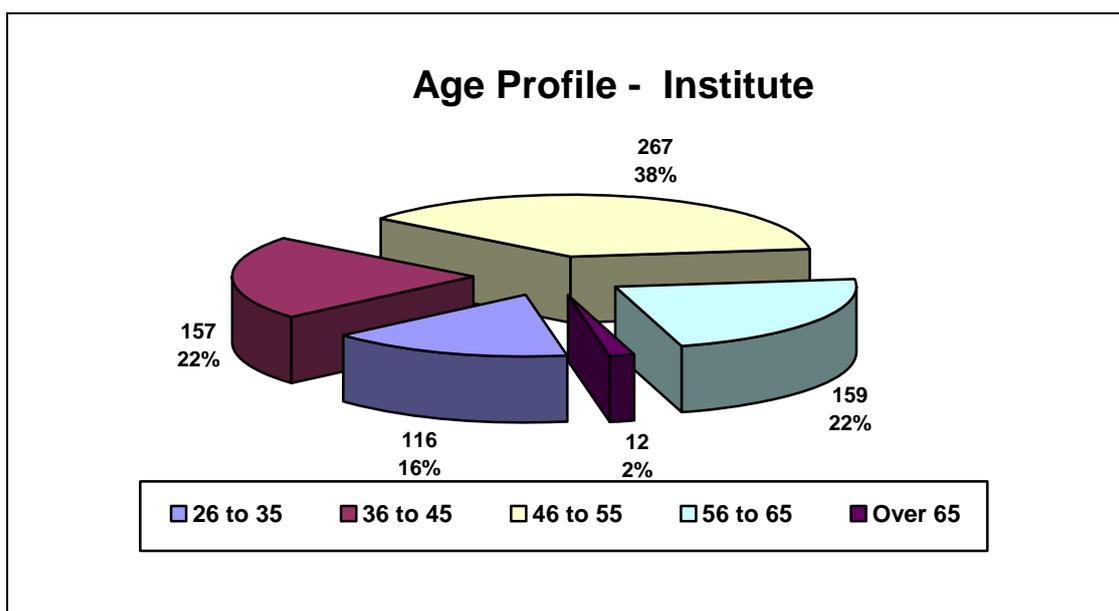
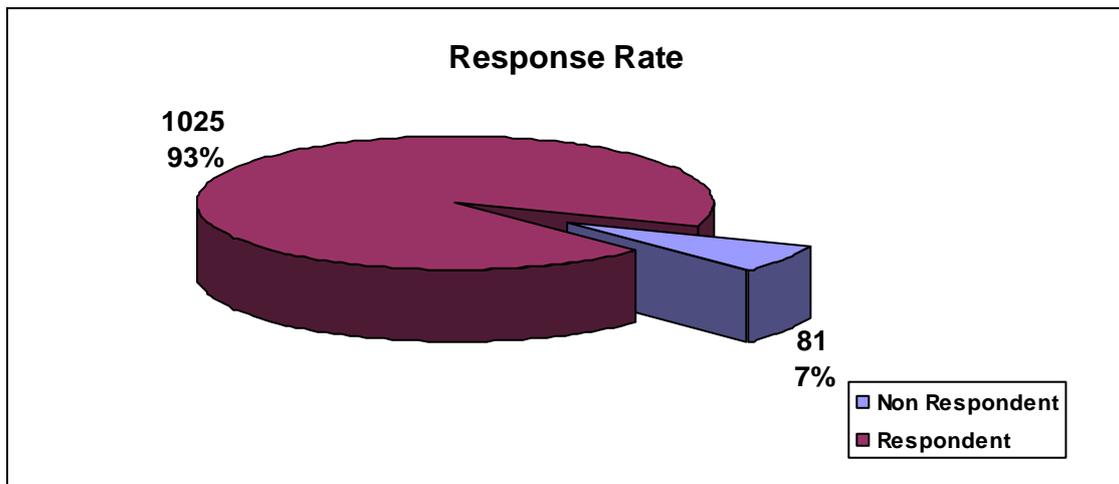
respondents of the constraints on the present service due to the perceived inadequacy of hours allocated by the DES. The need for additional ex-quota hours for guidance was called for across all strands of the review. The additional allocation provided in the 2005/06 academic year will go some way towards improving the situation for schools. However, given the requirement on schools under the Education Act 1998 to ensure that all students have access to appropriate guidance and the diverse range of student needs that schools must provide for, there is a need to further consider improving the allocation of ex-quota hours for guidance to schools.

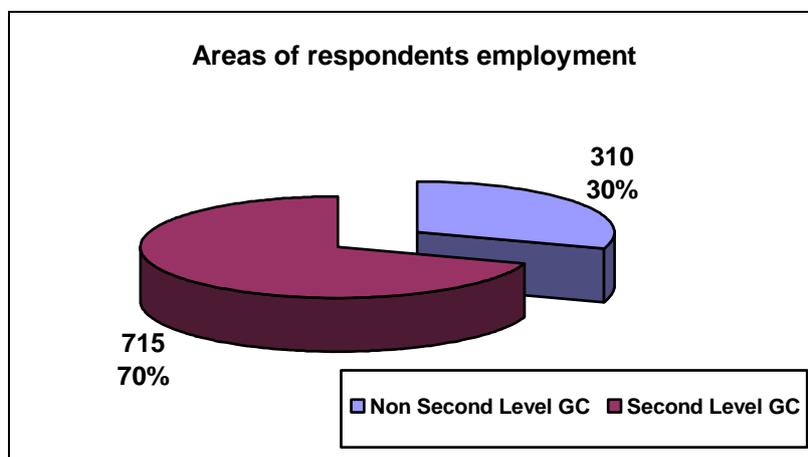
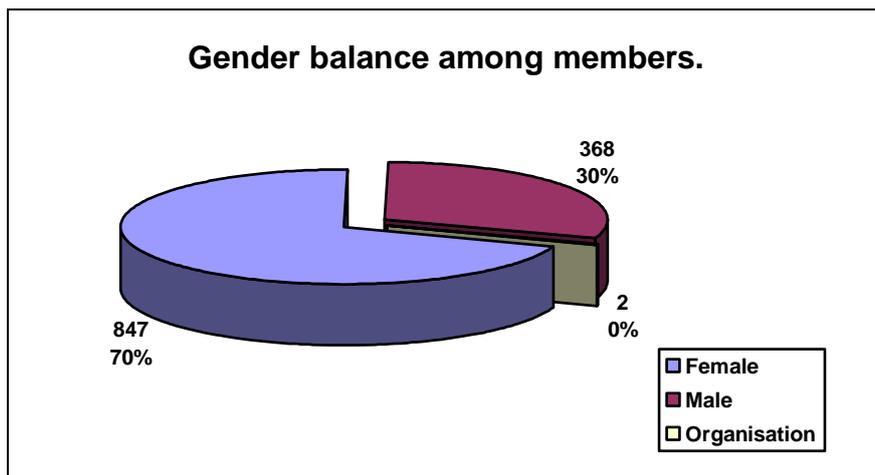
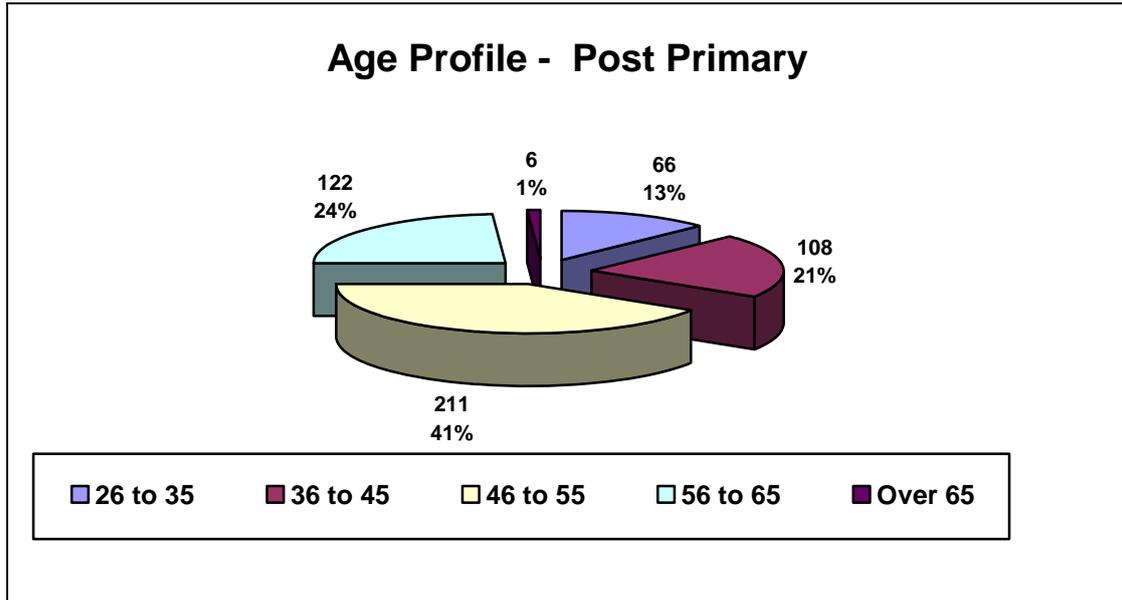
Issues around parental involvement in the guidance planning process in schools were highlighted in the review. In Strand 1, 81% of principals reported that consultation with parents was undertaken as part of the guidance activities of their school. However, in the focus groups of Strand 4 parents expressed desires to be more involved in their children's career guidance and to become better informed about issues such as subject choice, programme options in senior cycle and career options, in order to be in a position to help their children. The DES guidelines³⁵(page 8) state that *parents and students must be seen as an essential part of this process....* The discrepancy between the responses of principals and parents points to a need for schools to evaluate the extent to which their consultation processes with parents are successful in ensuring that parents' views and needs are adequately and appropriately addressed during the design of guidance programmes.

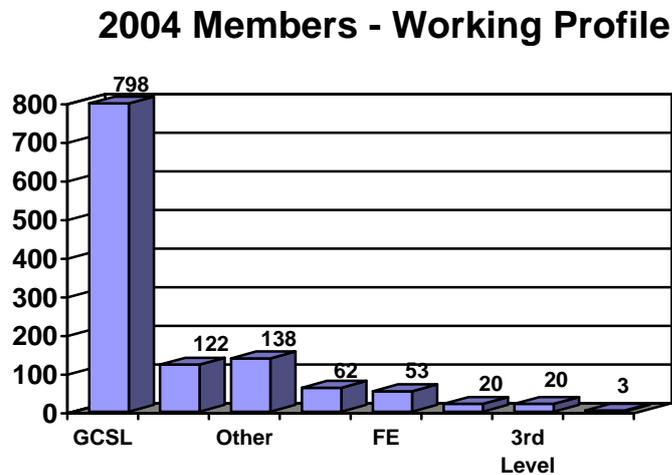
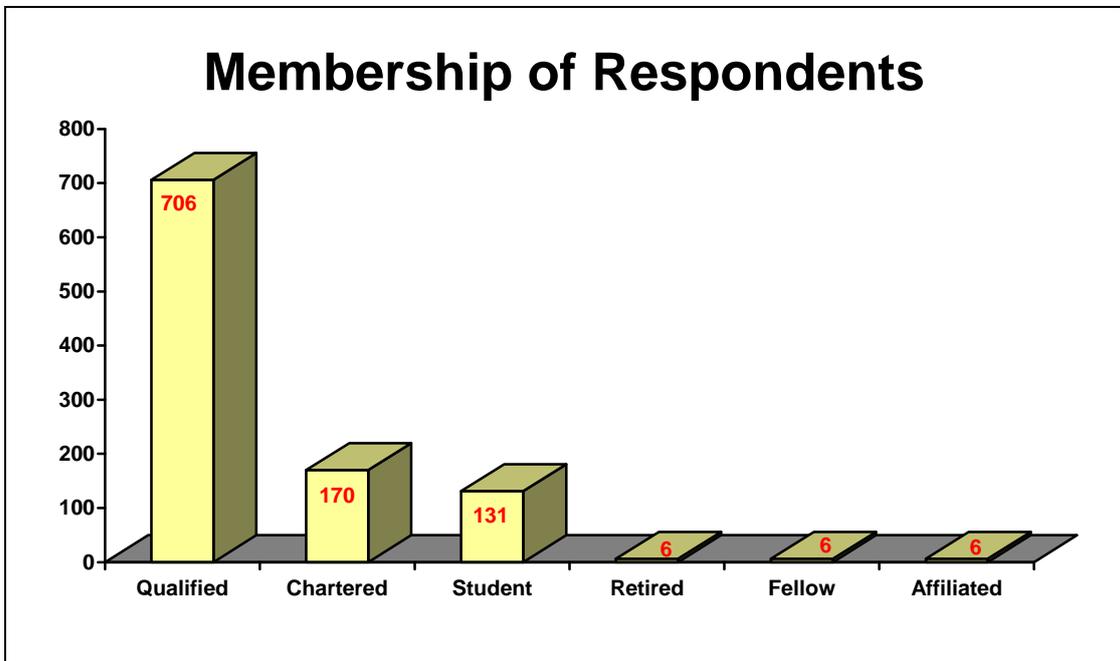
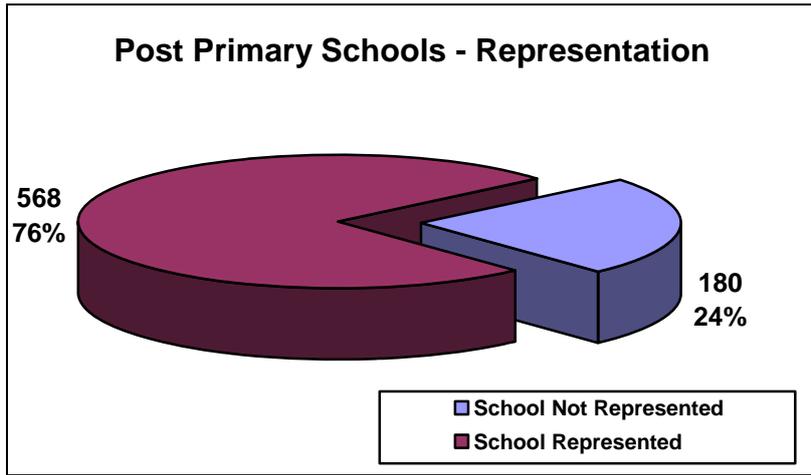
³⁵ Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance.

Appendix 1

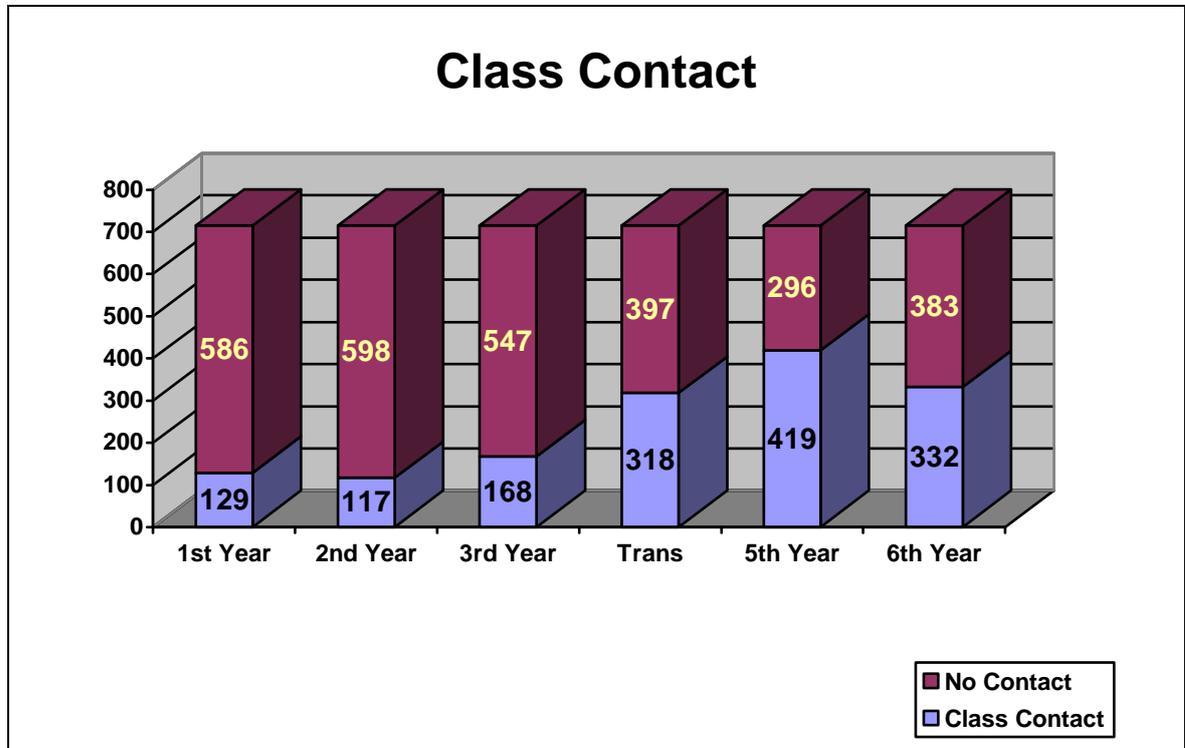
The following data is the result of a Professional Profile, undertaken by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, among its members in 2003, to facilitate the Minister for Education and Science, Ms. Mary Hanafin in her review of the guidance and counselling system in Ireland.



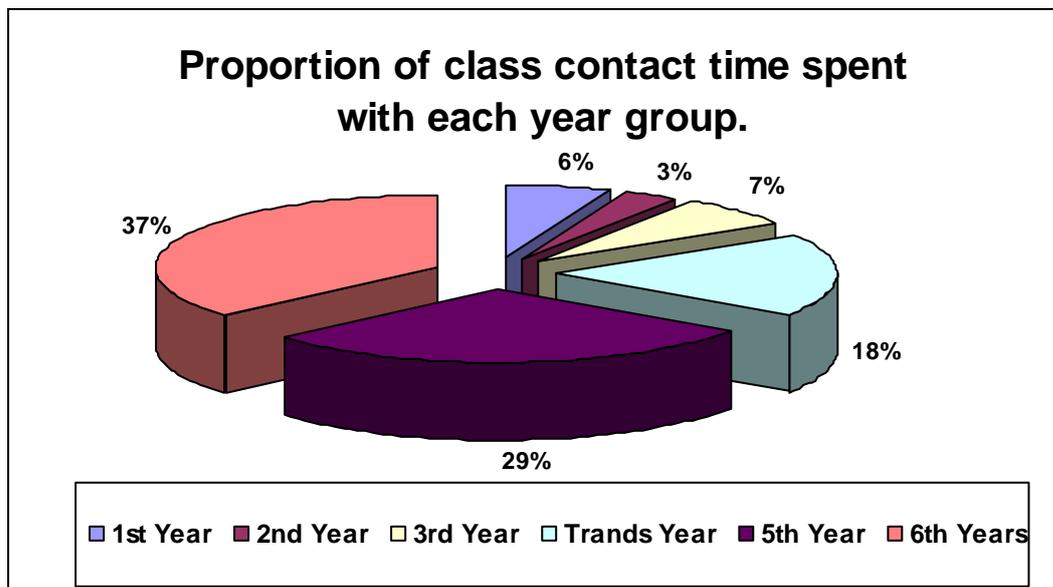


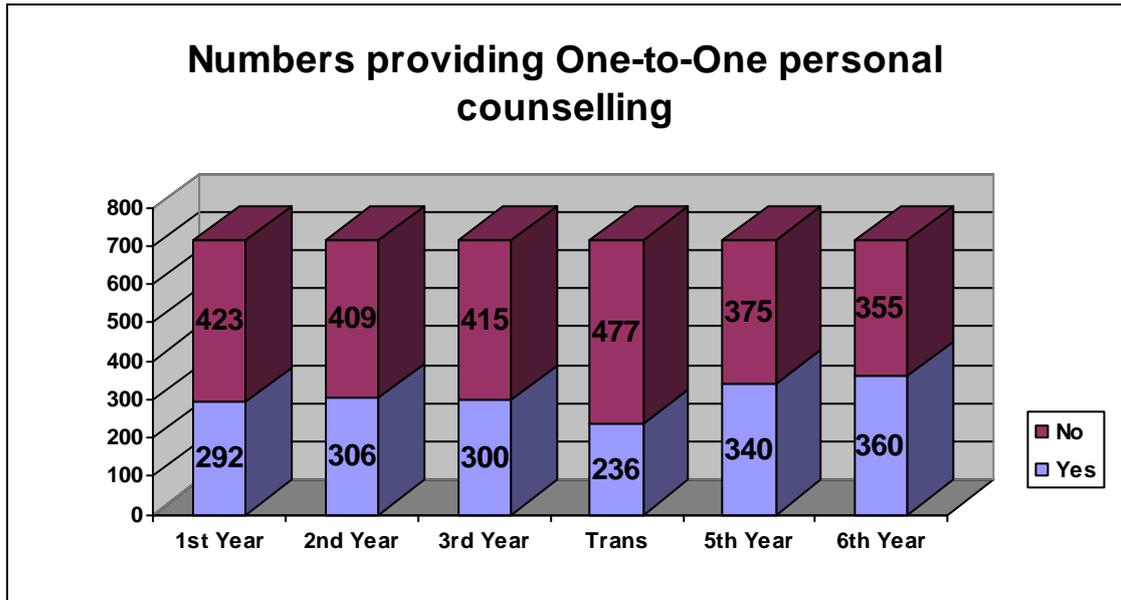


All of the following charts are based, on 715 of the 1025 respondents, who are employed as a Guidance Counsellor, in 568 Second Level Schools

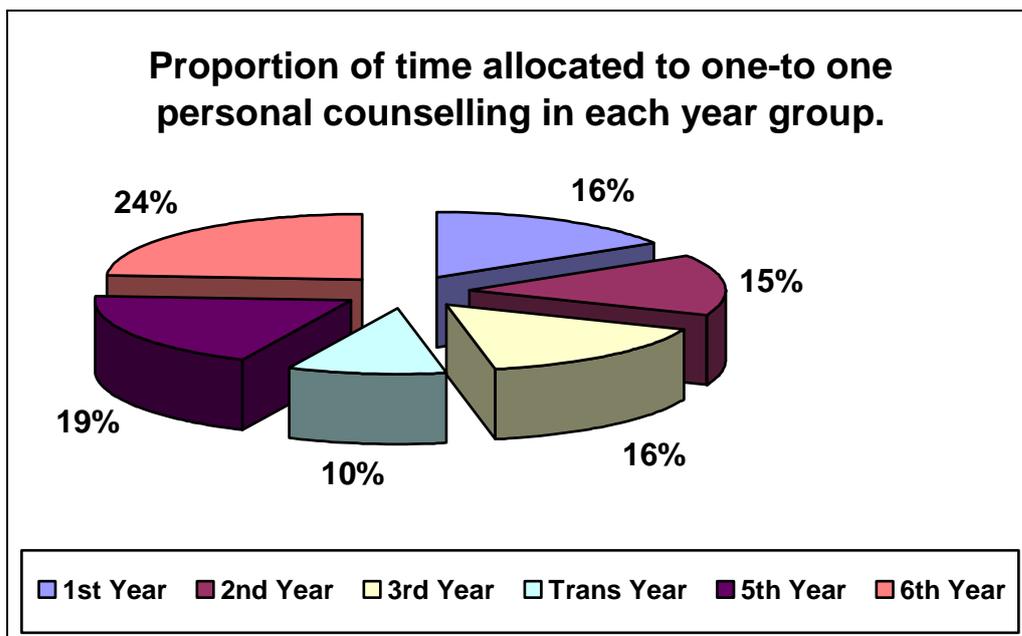


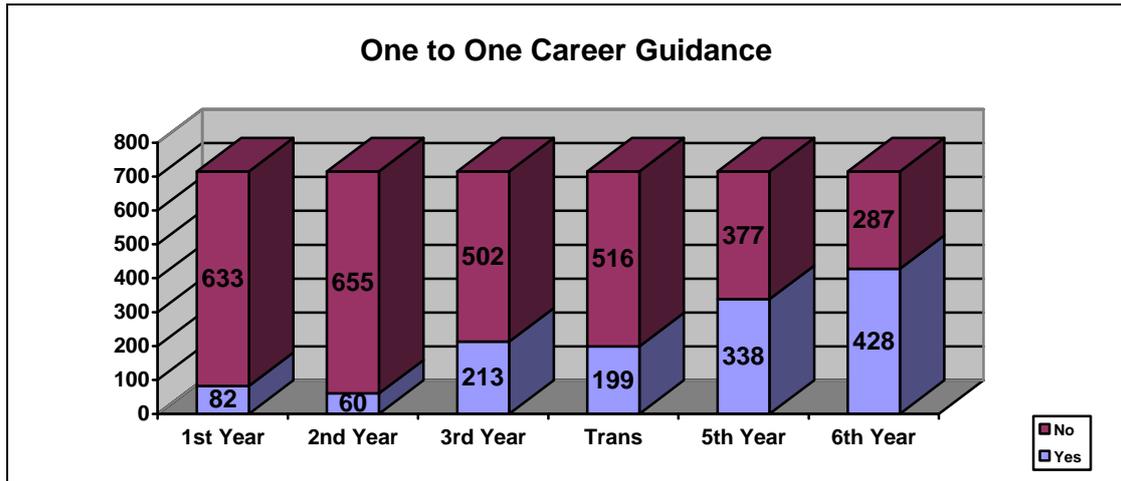
Of the Respondents, 381 returned class contact time information. The total average time spent in classroom guidance activities, among this group is 4:41 (HH:mm) per week.



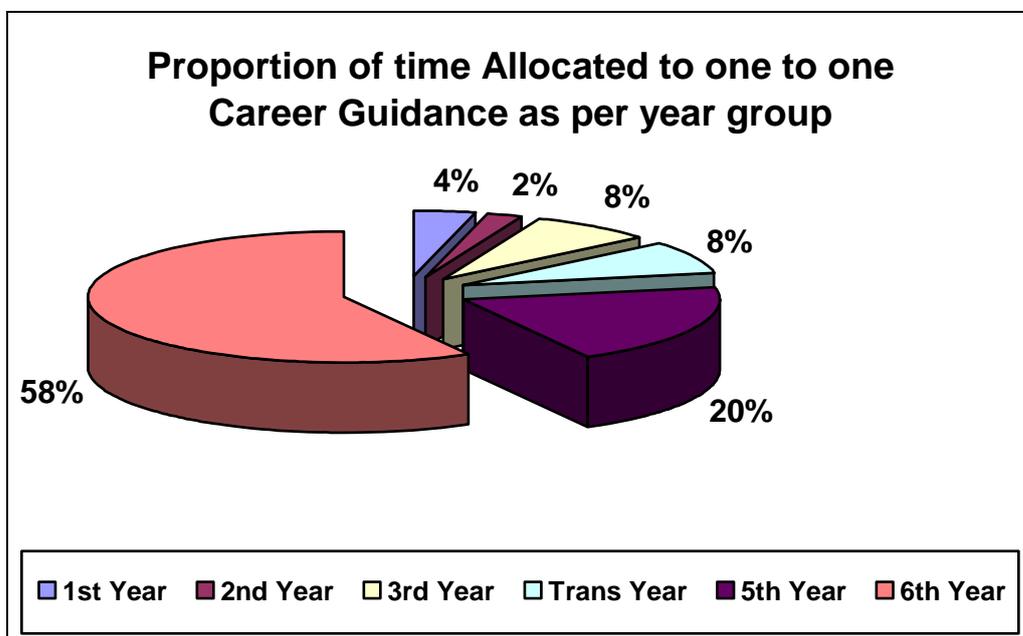


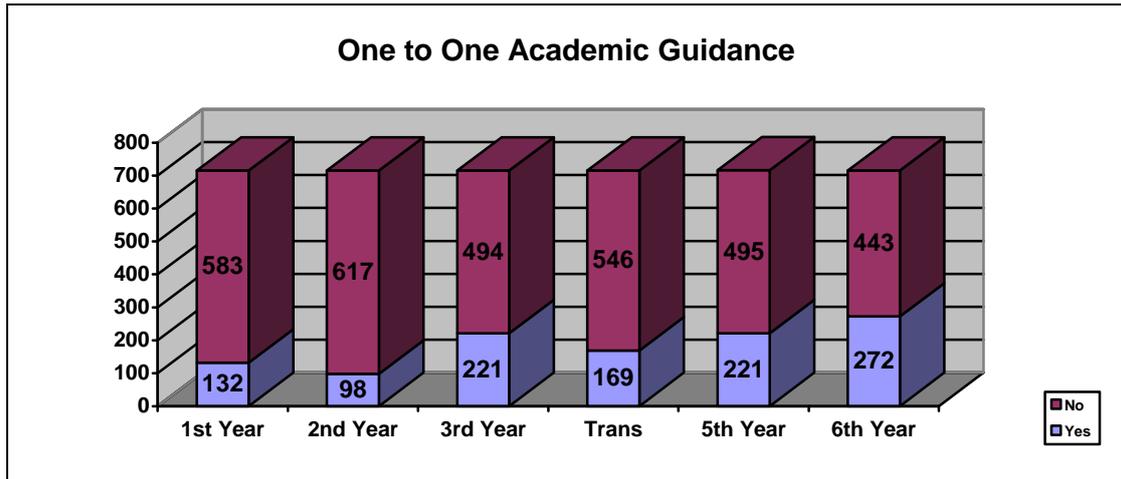
Of the Respondents, 248 returned one-to-one personal counselling time information. The total average time dedicated to personal counselling among this group is 5:00 (HH:mm) per week.



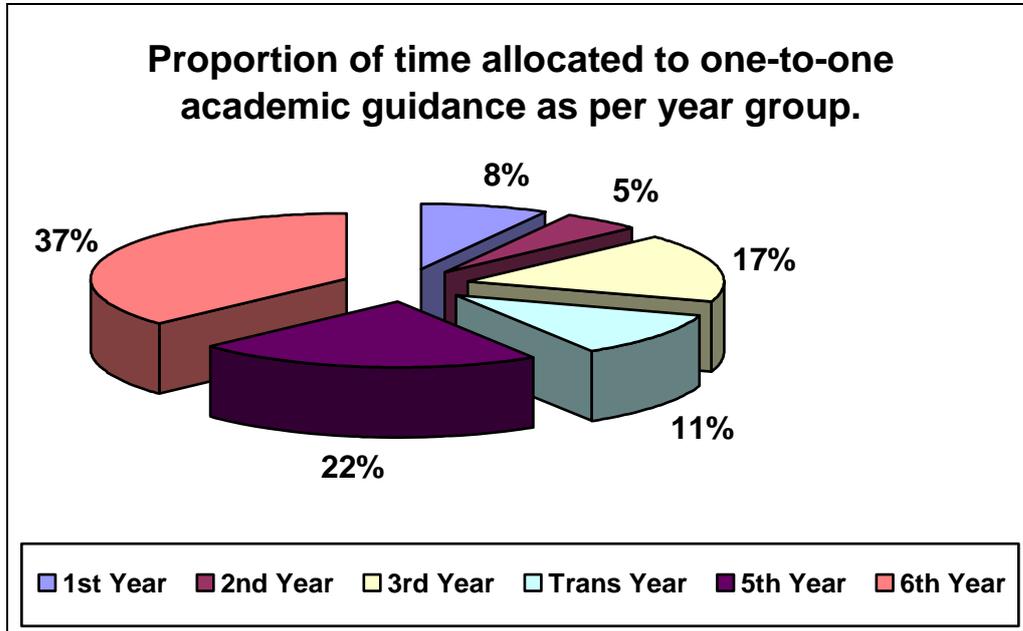


Of the Respondents, 274 returned one to one Careers Guidance time information. The total average time spent providing one-to-one career guidance among this group is 6:30 (HH:mm) per week.

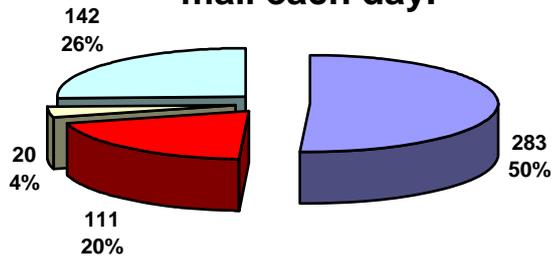




Of the Respondents, 184 returned one-to-one academic guidance, time information. The total average time spent providing one-to-one academic guidance among this group is 3:07 (HH:mm) per week.

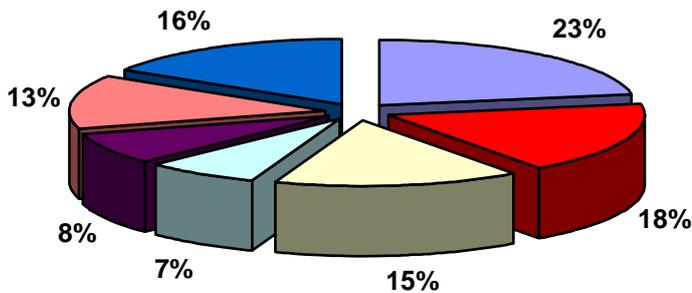


Hours spent on administration and mail each day.



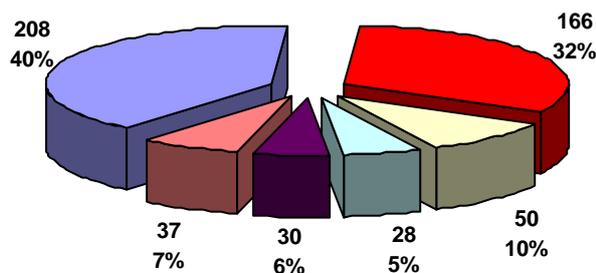
- 1/2 to 1 Hour
- 1 to 2 Hours
- 2 Hours or more
- Less than 1/2 Hour

Hours spent at meetings in school per month

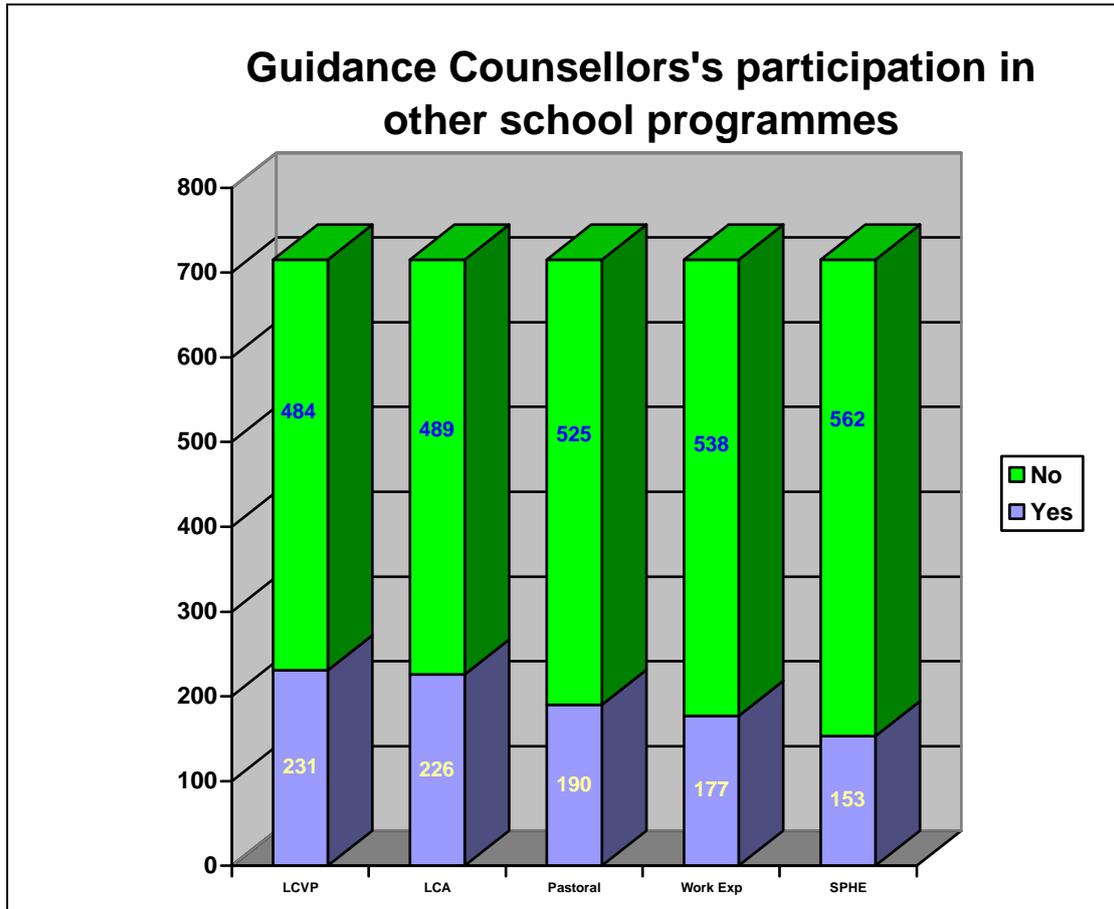


- 1 to 2 Hours
- 2 to 3 Hours
- 3 to 4 Hours
- 4 to 5 Hours
- 5 to 6 Hours
- 6 Hours or more
- Less Than 1 Hour

Days spent out of school per month on guidance related activities.



- 1 Day
- 2 Days
- 3 Days
- 4 Days
- 5 Or more days
- Less than 1 day



Below, are the average time spent by Guidance Counsellors per week, in each of the programmes listed below:

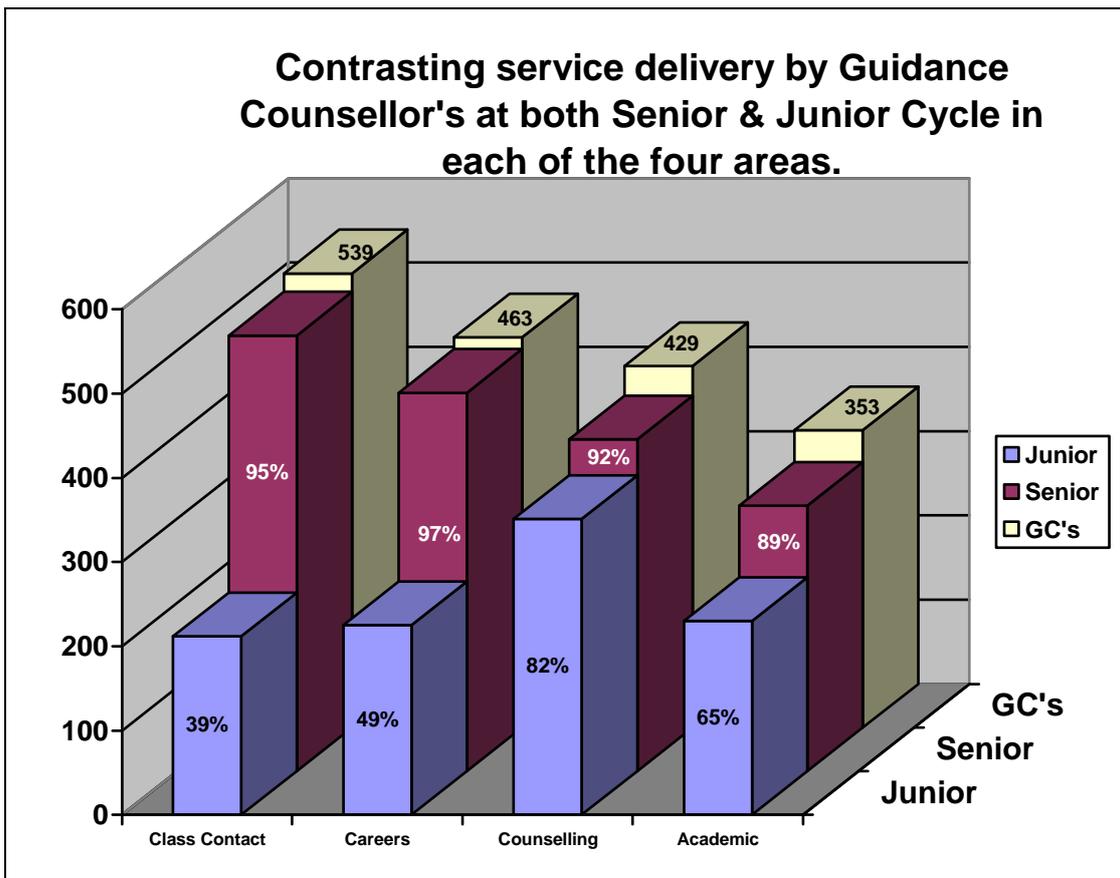
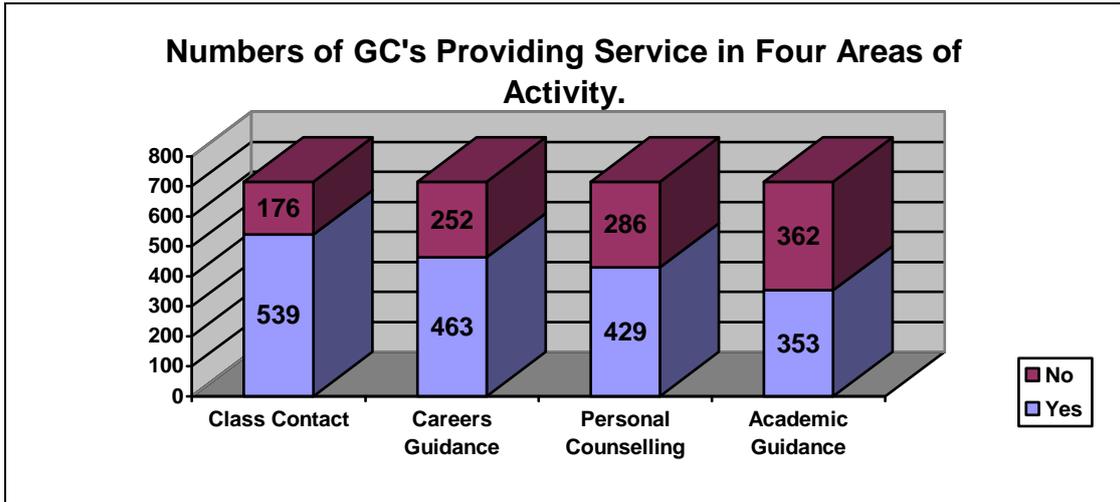
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme 1:44 (H.MM.) per week.

Leaving Certificate Applied Programme 2:00 (H.MM.) per week.

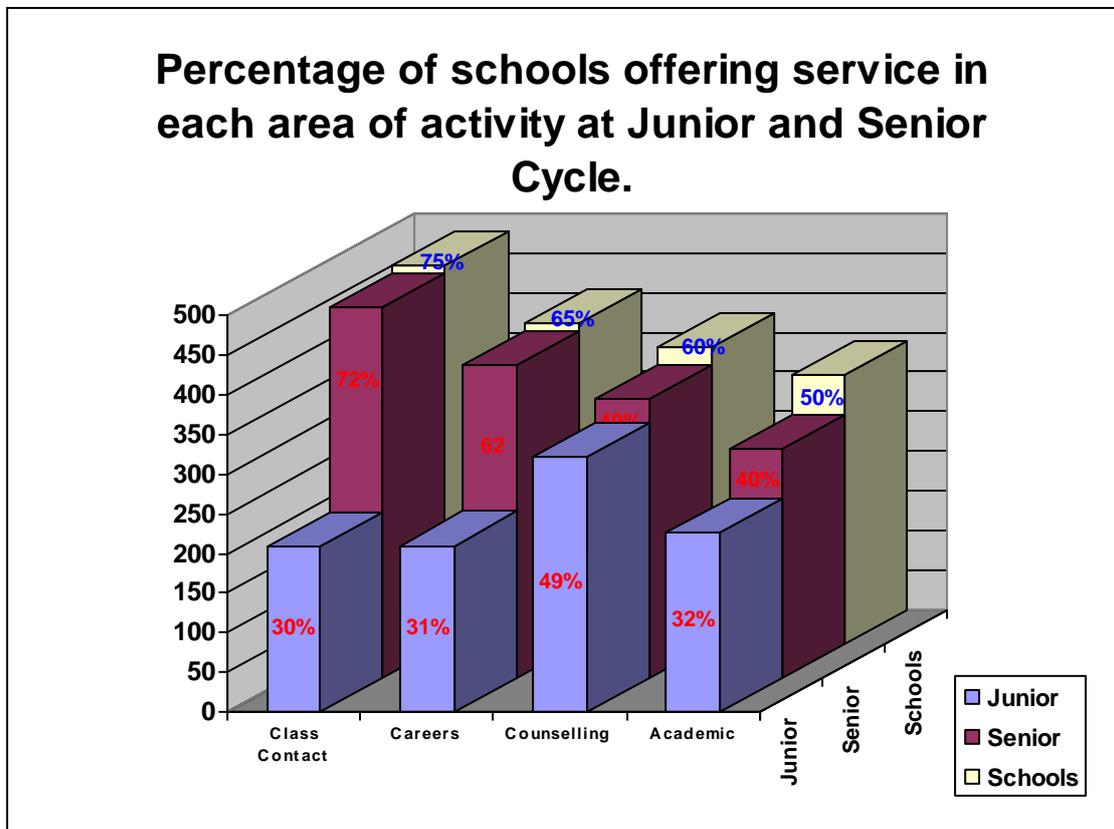
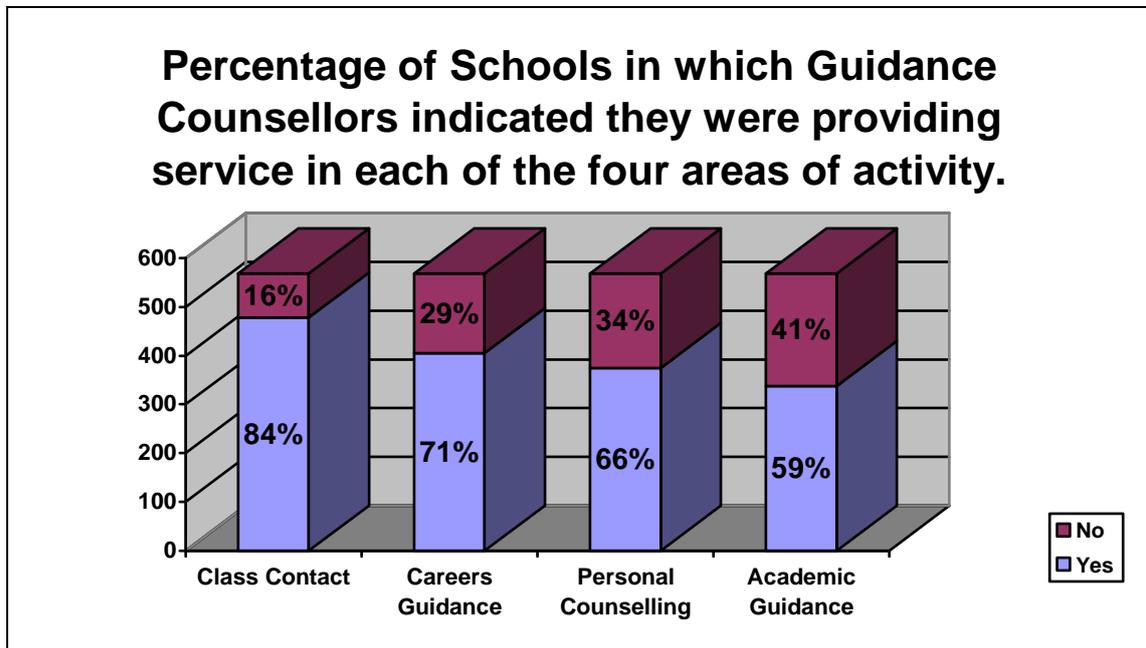
Pastoral Care Programmes 1:36 (H.MM.) per week.

Work Experience Programmes 1:45 (H.MM.) per week.

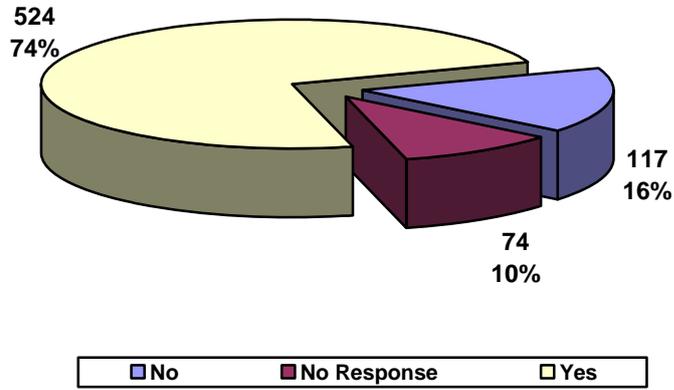
Social Personal and Health Education Programmes 1:52 (H.MM.)



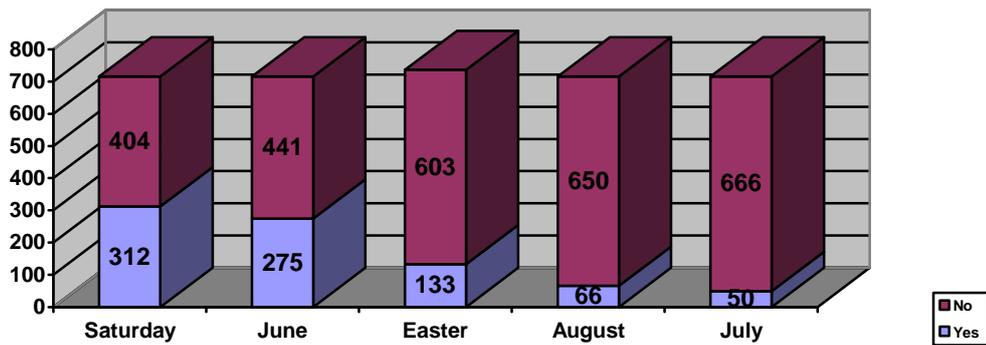
The 715 respondents, operate as Guidance Counsellors in 568 schools in the second level school system.



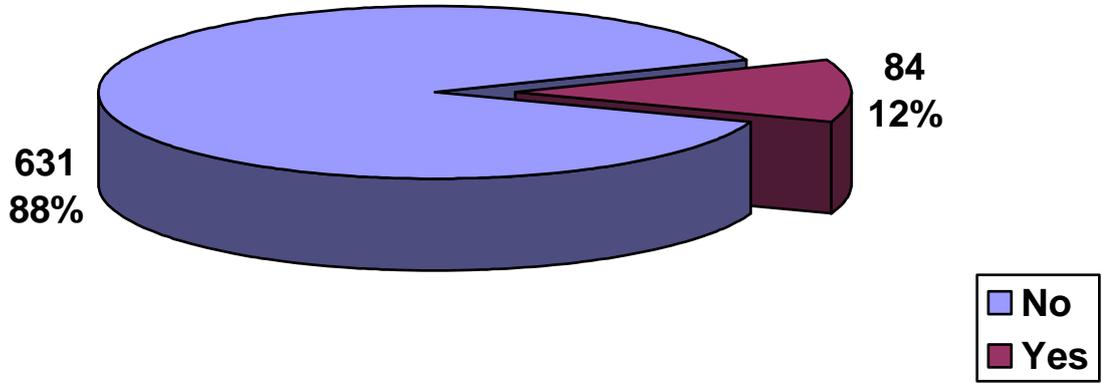
Willing to attend Inservice Outside School Hours



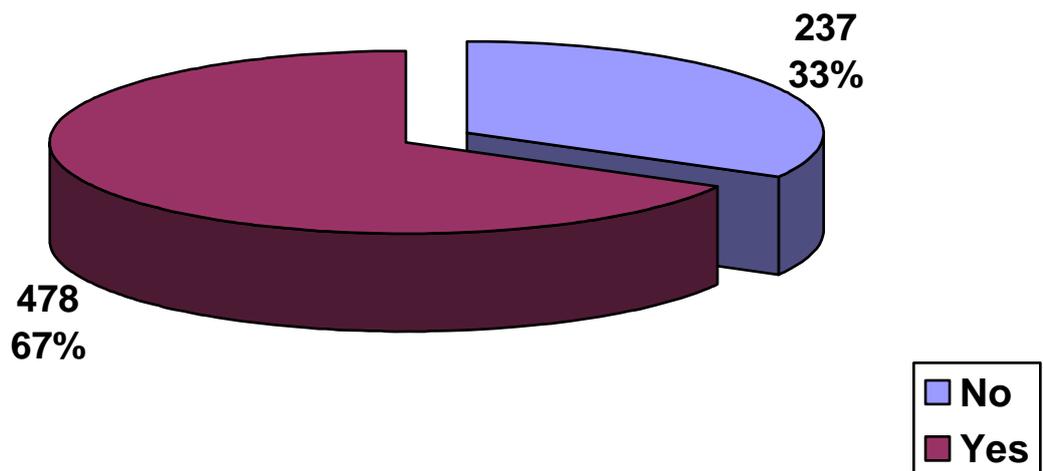
Preferred Time for In-Service Out Side Schol Hours

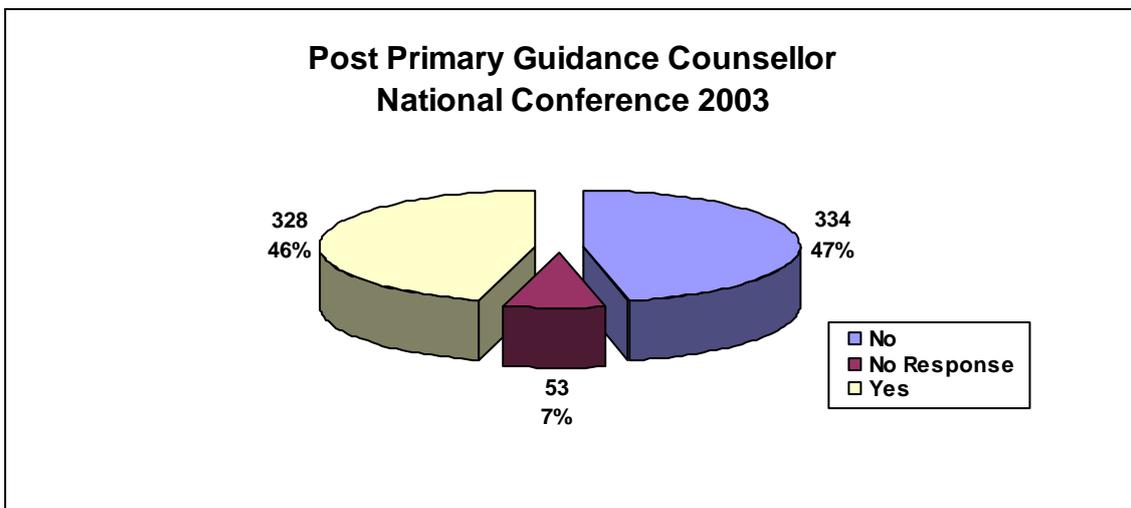
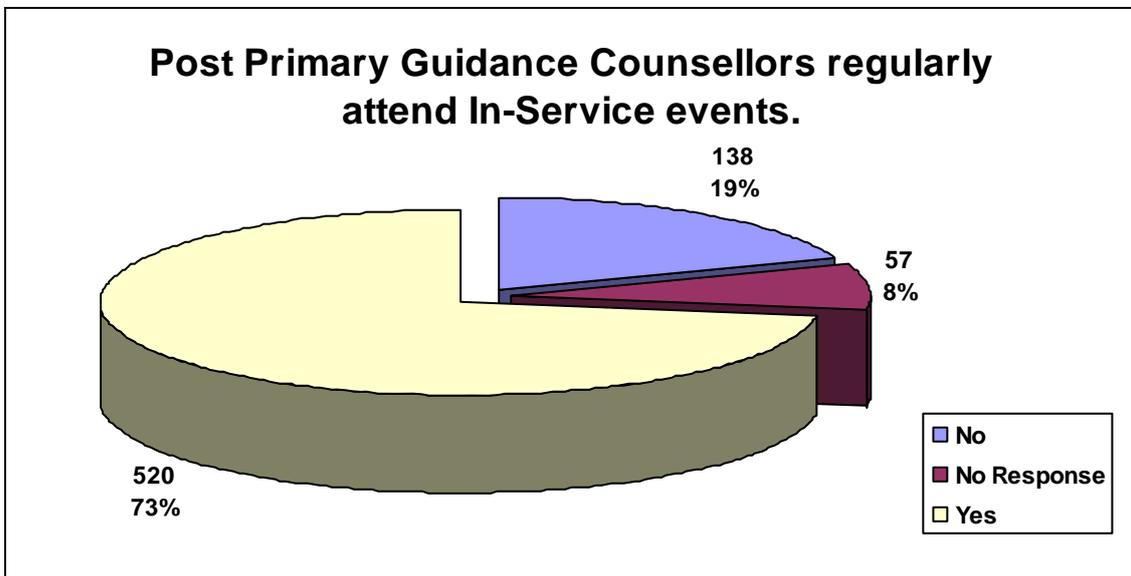
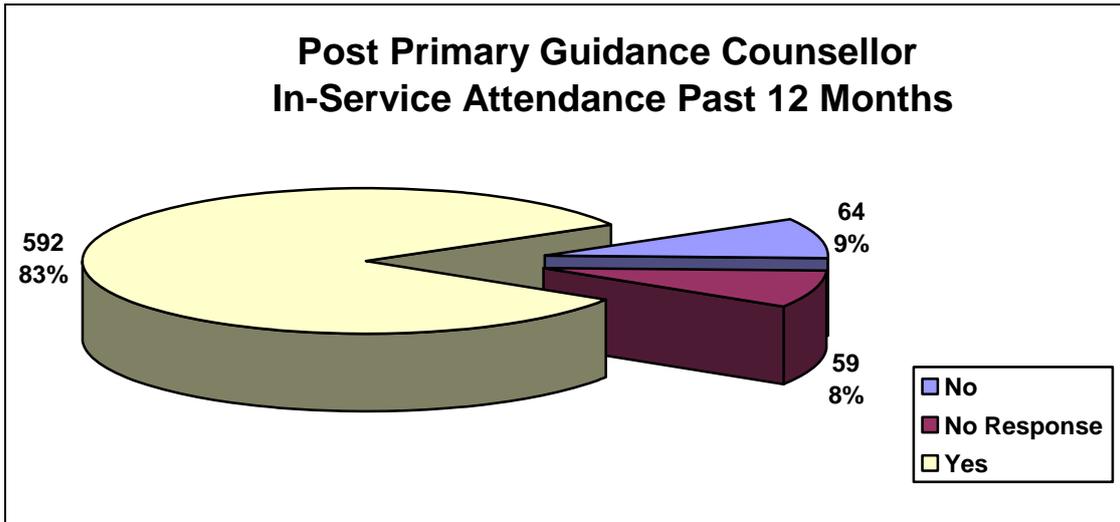


Contrasting preferences among Guidance Counsellors as between Local as opposed to National Inservice Events

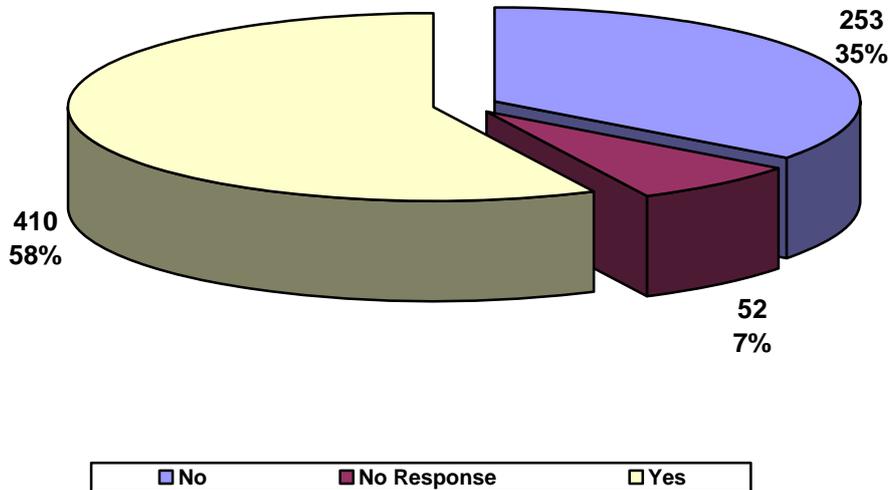


Percentage who prefer regional in-service events.

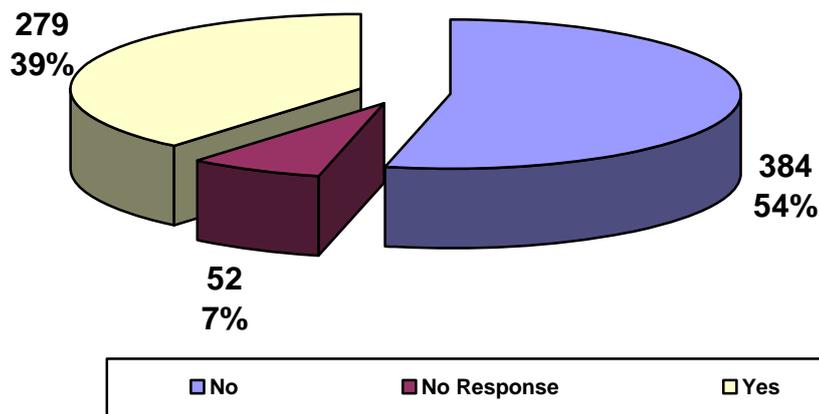


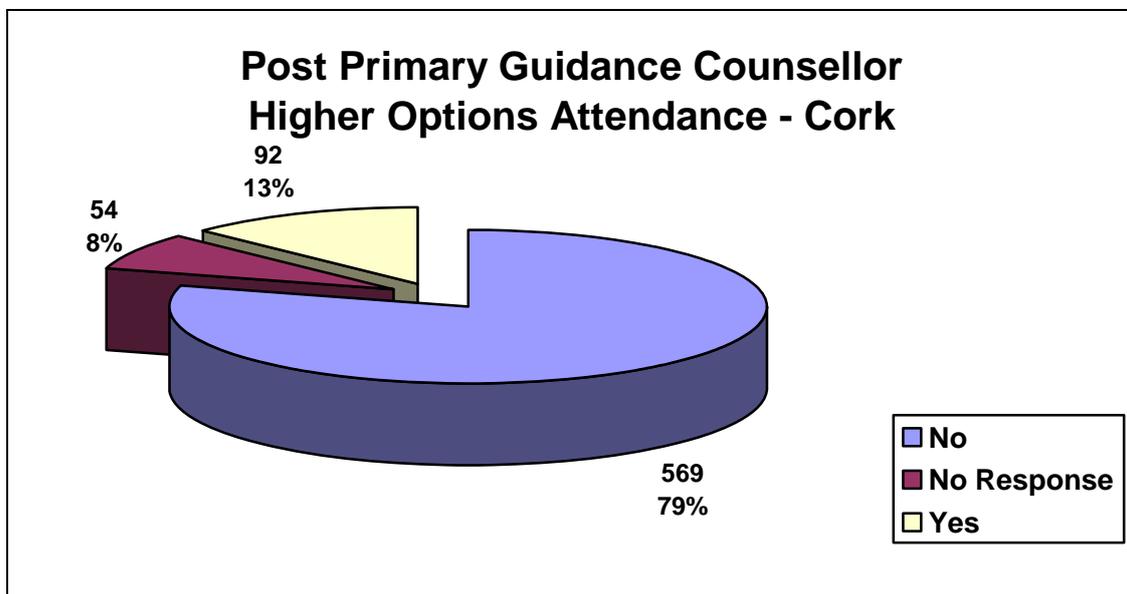
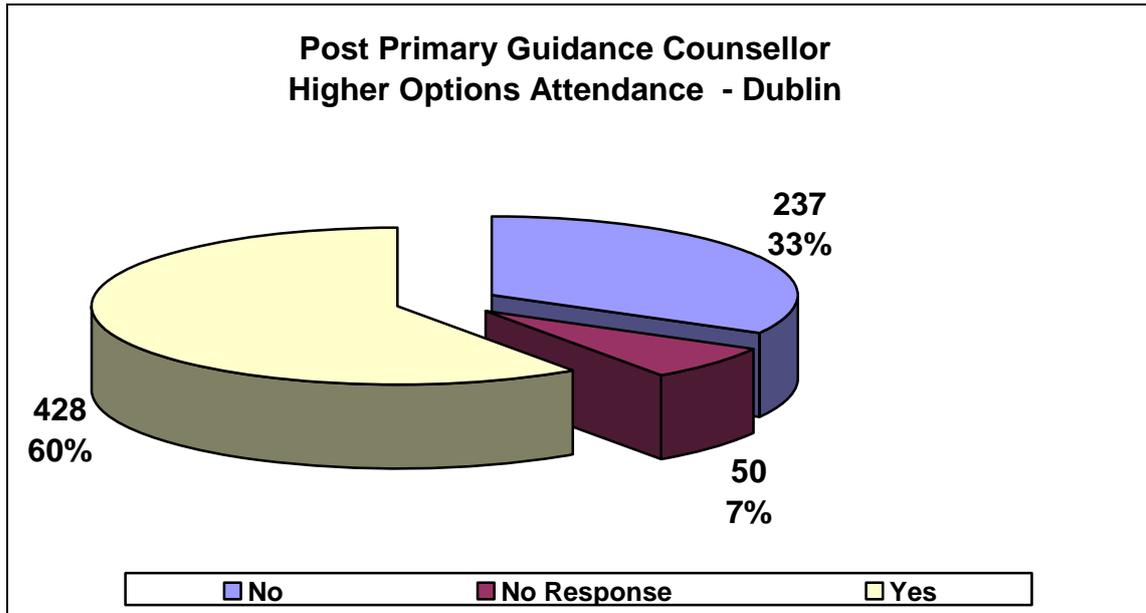


Post Primary Guidance Counsellor Branch Meetings 2002/2003

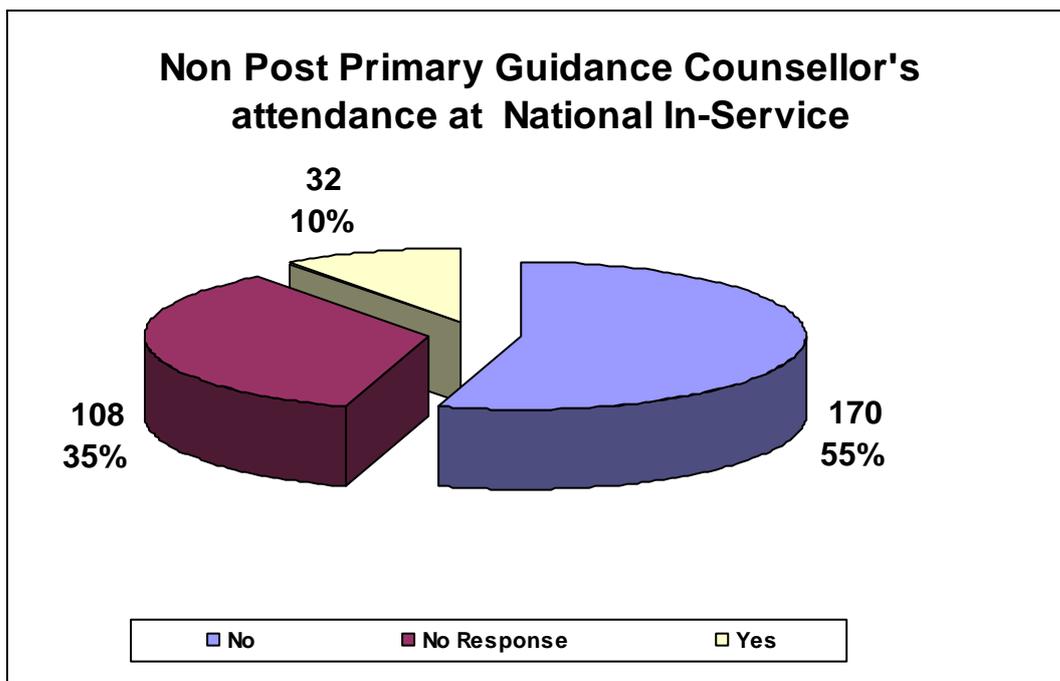
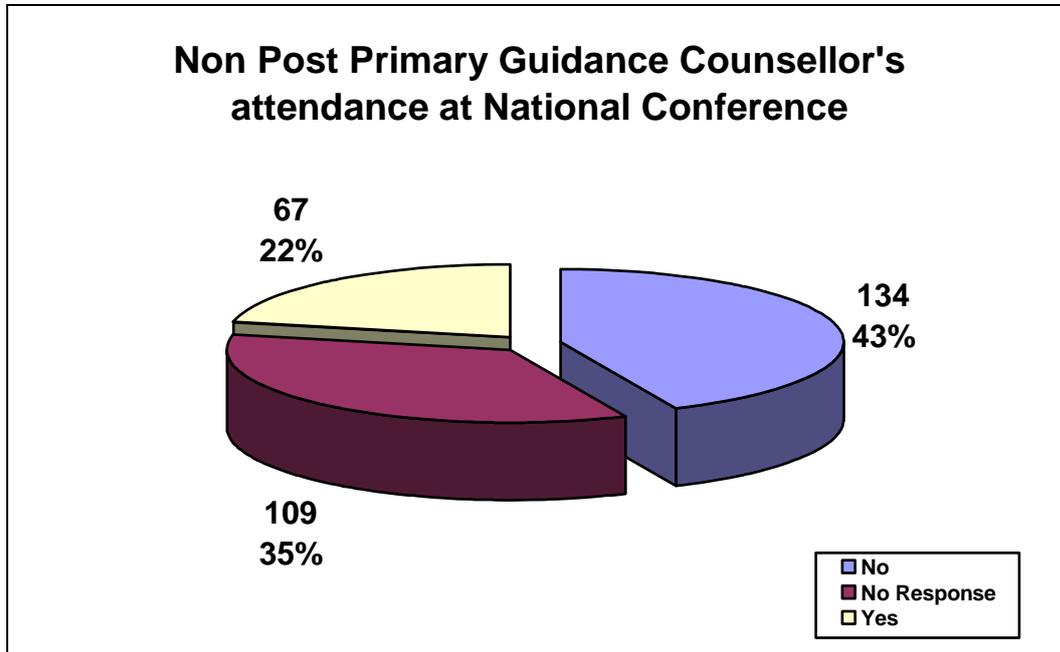


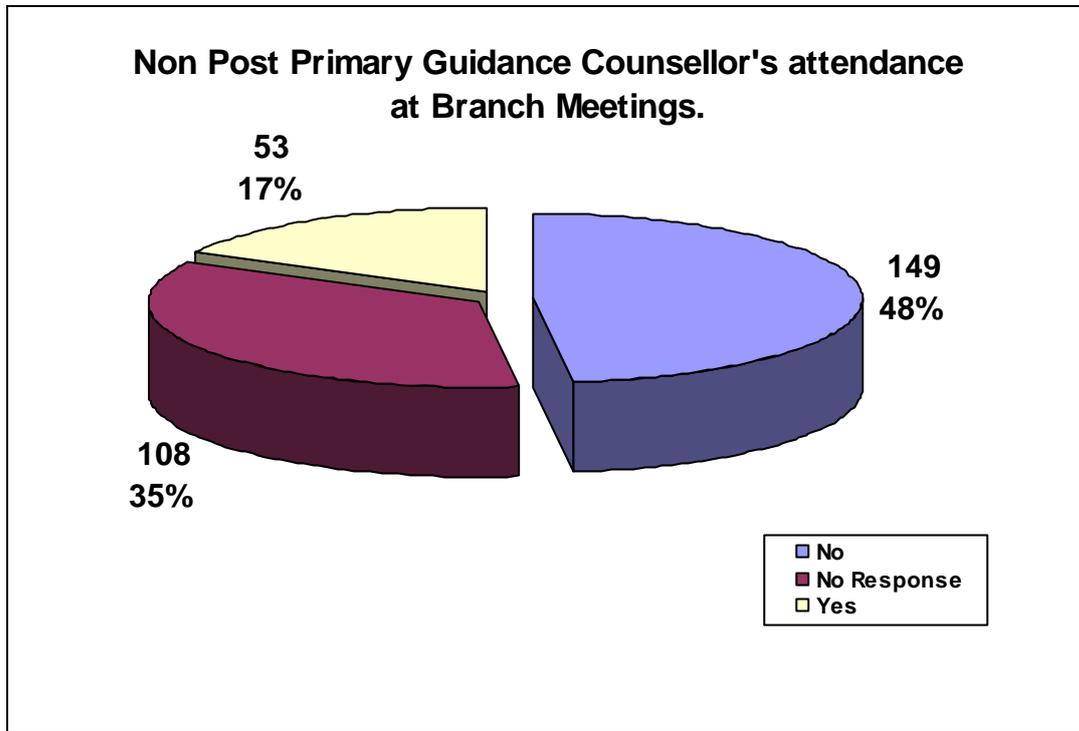
Post Primary Guidance Counsellor National In Service 2002



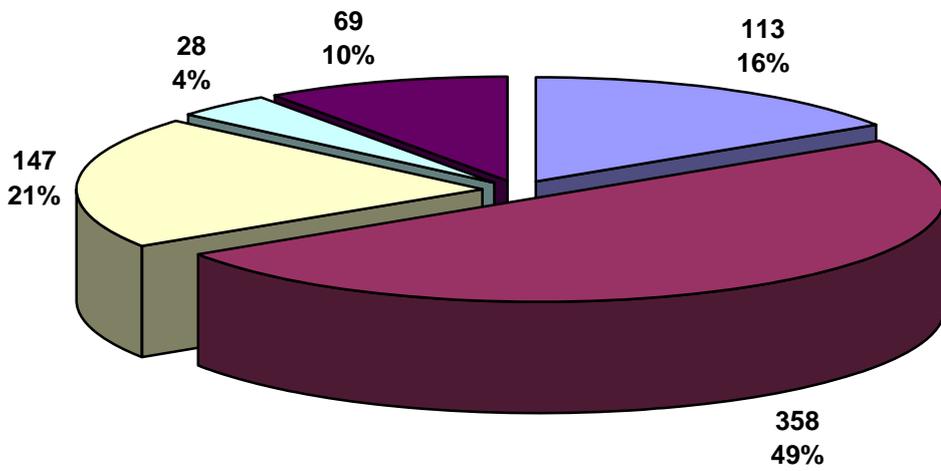


The next three charts show the level of participation among non-second level Guidance Counsellors at national conferences, national in-service activities, and local branch meetings.



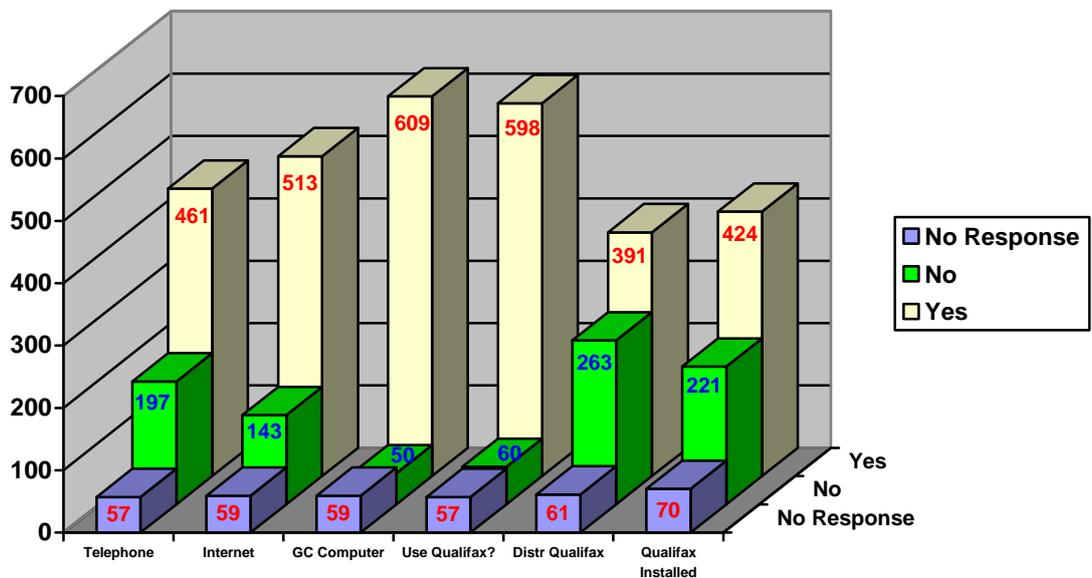


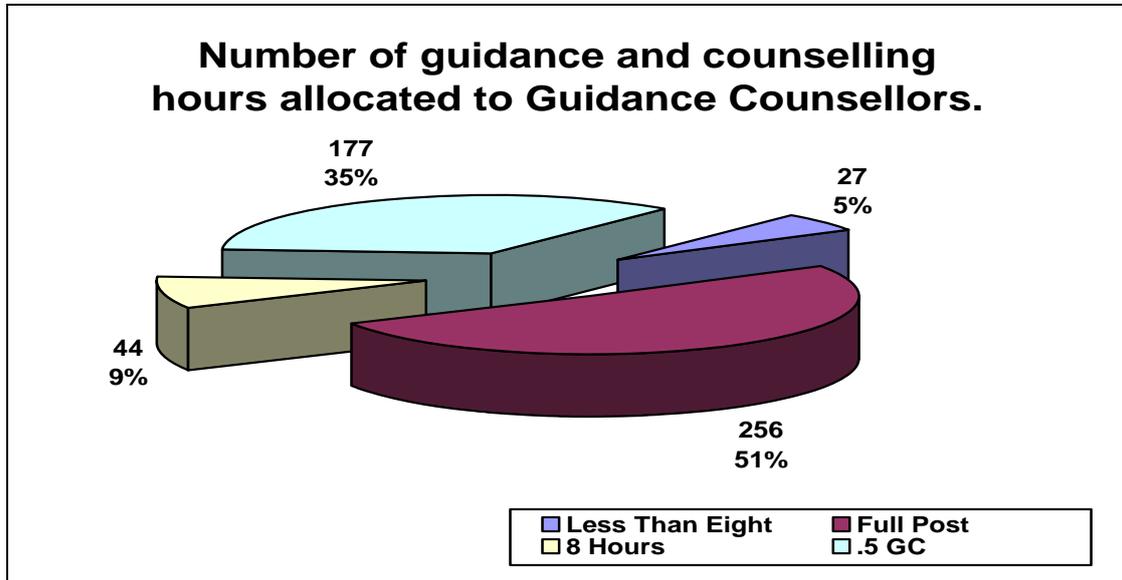
Student Access to Computer for Guidance - 2003



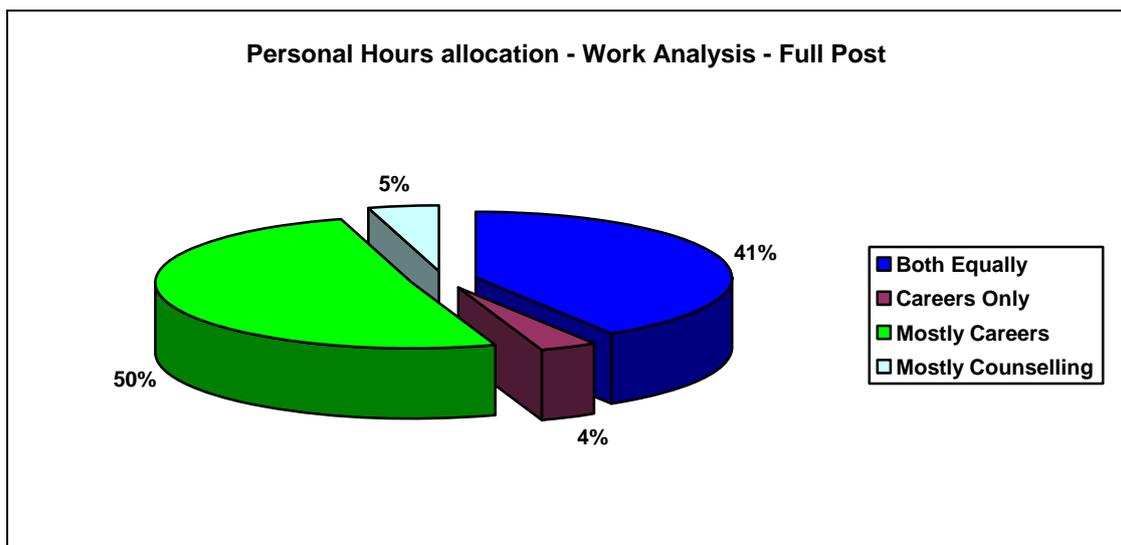
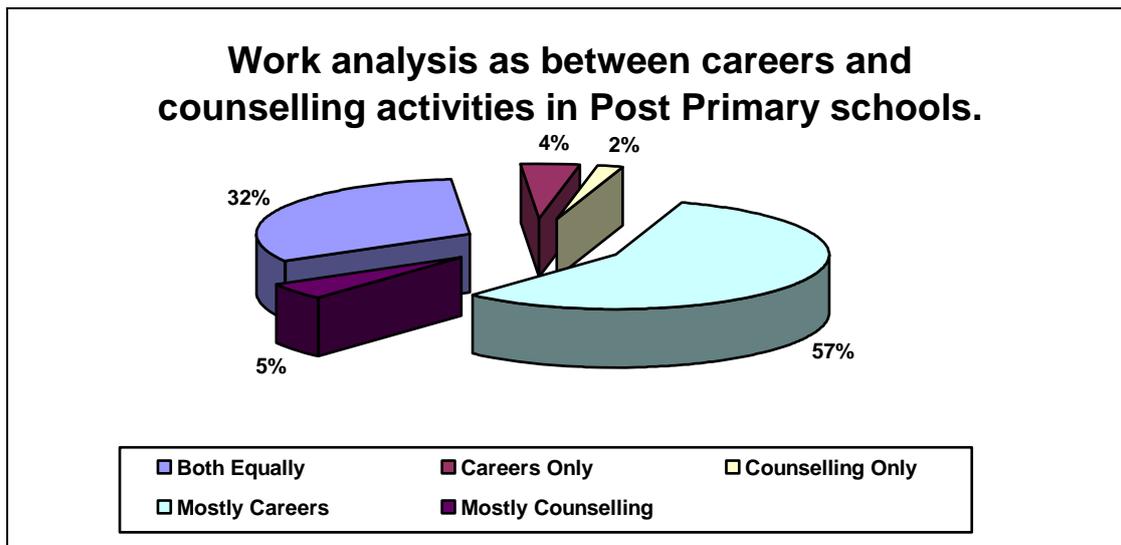
■ All Students
 ■ Limited Access
 ■ Senior Cycle Only
 ■ No Computer Room
 ■ No Response

Guidance Counsellors Use of Technology 2003

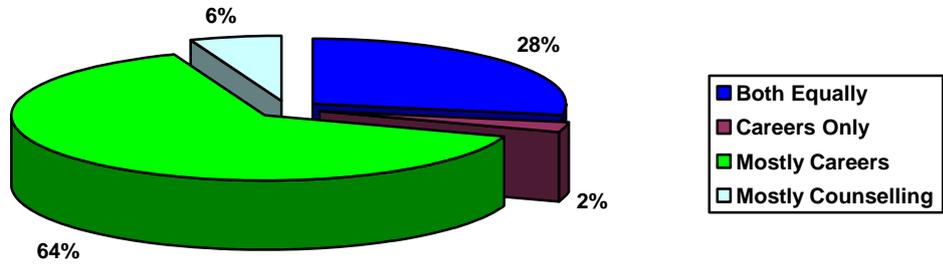




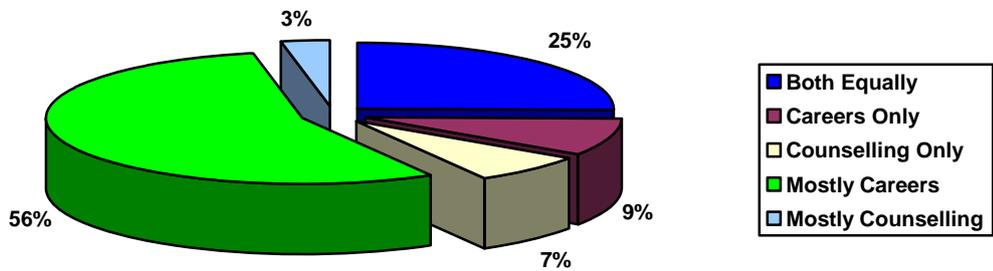
All of the following charts analysis the proportion of time spent by Guidance Counsellors as between Careers and Personal Counselling work. The first chart looks at the proportion across all Guidance Counsellors. The second chart focuses on those who are full timer Guidance Counsellors. The third chart looks at those who are spending half of their working week involved in guidance and counselling and the other half in subject teaching. The fourth chart looks at those who spend more than half their working week as subject teachers. The fifth chart looks at the proportion of time spent as between the two activities by male Guidance Counsellors. The sixth and final chart in the series looks at the proportions among female Guidance Counsellors.



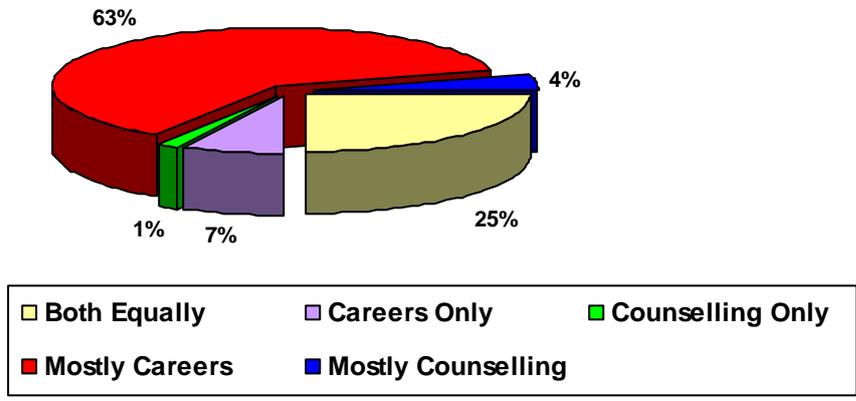
Personal Hours allocation - Work Analysis -.5 Post



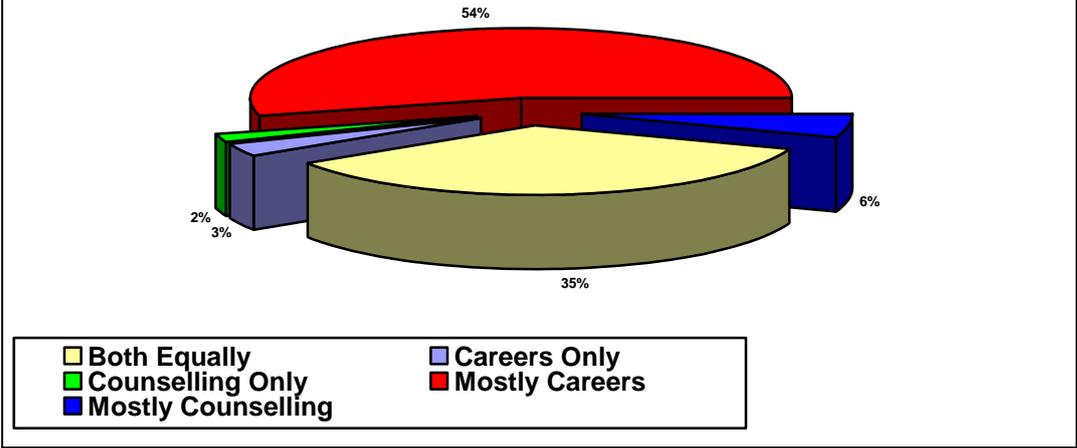
Personal Hours allocation - Work Analysis - Less than .5 Post



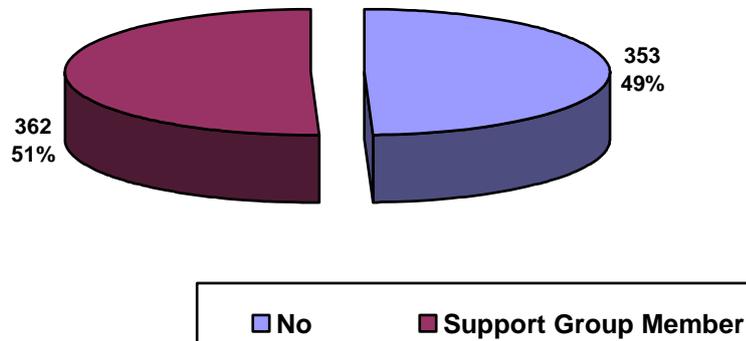
Work Profile Males - Post Primary



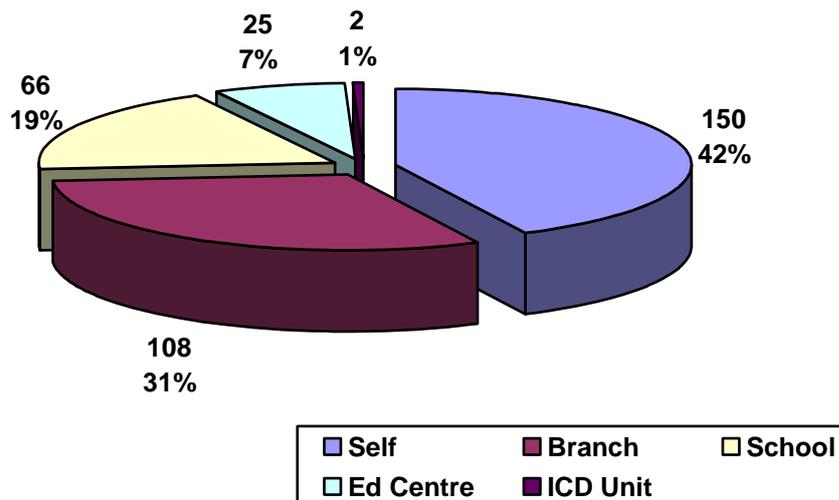
Work Profile Females



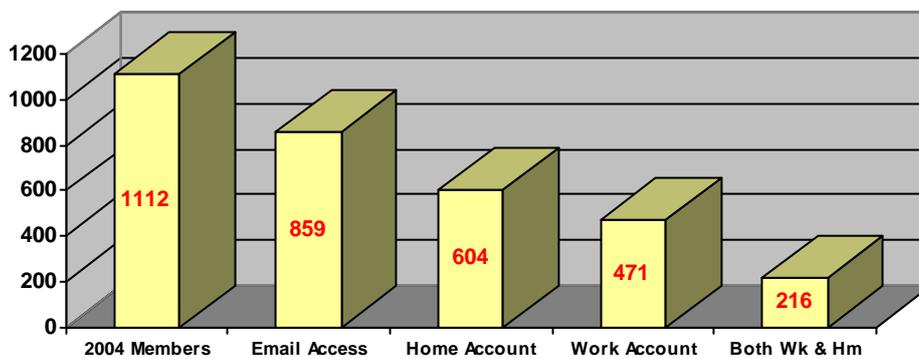
Percentage engaged in professionally supervised support group.

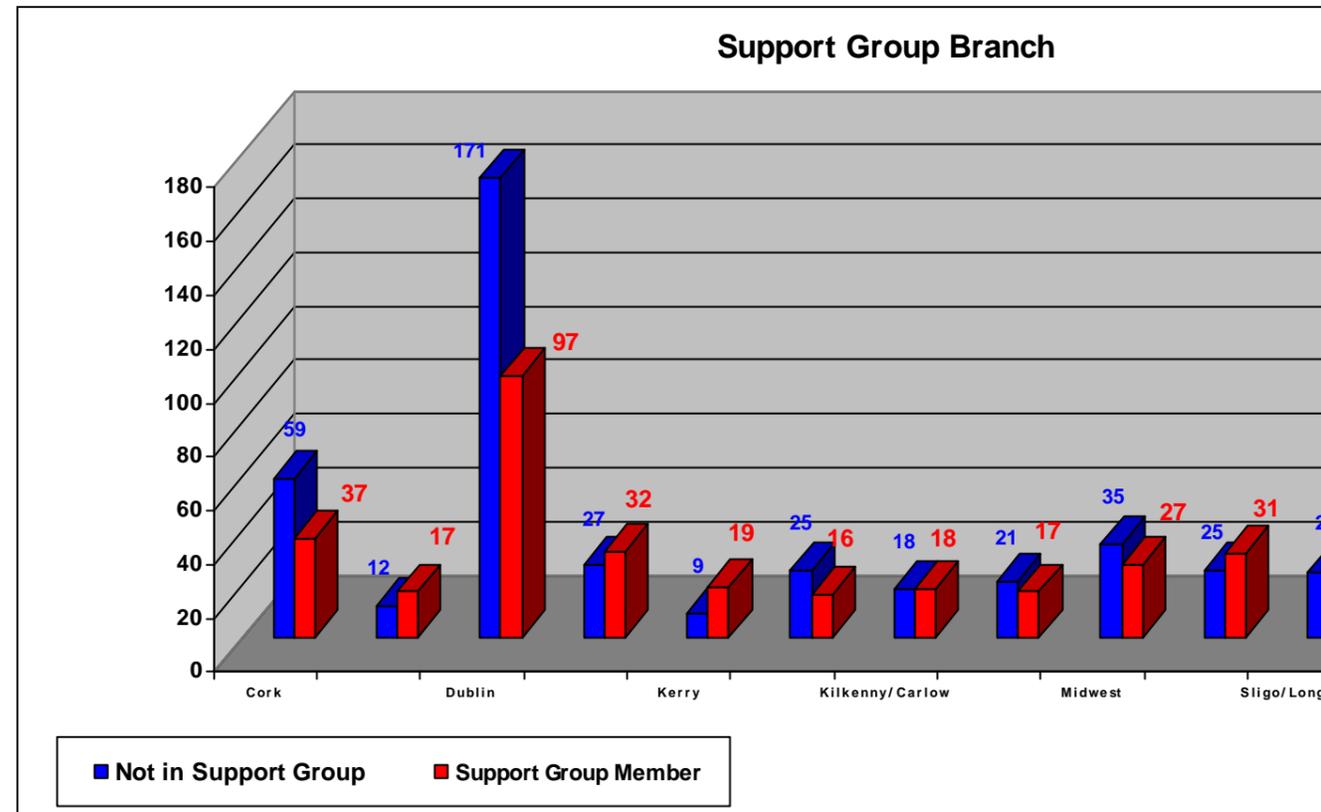


Source of funding for professionally supervised support group.



Current Membership - Email Account Owner (Sept 2004)





Appendix 2

Allocation of hours for the provision of guidance in schools pre-2005/2006

All second-level schools in the Free Education Scheme/Block Grant Scheme qualify for an allocation of hours in respect of guidance, in accordance with Schedule A below. Schools not in these schemes qualify for an allocation in accordance with Schedule B.

Schedule A

Enrolment	Allocation
1000+ students	44 hours/week
800-999 students	33 hours/week
500-799 students	22 hours/week
250-499 students	11 hours/week
200-249 students	8.8 hours/week
<200 students	8 hours/week

Schedule B

Enrolment	Allocation
500+ students	22 hours/week
350-499 students	11 hours/week

Appendix 3

An Roinn Oideachais agus
Eolaíochta
Rannóg Múinteoirí
Iarbhunoidreachais
Cor na Madadh,
Átha Luain,
Co. Na hIarmhí.



Department of Education
and Science
Post Primary Teacher Section
Cormacaddy,
Athlone,
Co. Westmeath

Circular Letter No
PPT 12/05

To: The Managerial Authorities of Secondary,
Community and Comprehensive Schools.

GUIDANCE PROVISION IN SECOND LEVEL SCHOOLS

1. I am directed by the Minister for Education and Science to bring to your notice the provisions which will apply, from the beginning of the 2005/06 school year, in relation to:
 - allocation of hours for the provision of guidance in schools
 - conditions of appointment of guidance counsellors.

For the purposes of this circular, guidance in second-level schools refers to a range of learning experiences that assist students to develop self-management skills that will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. Guidance encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance. According to Section 9 of the Education Act (1998) a recognised school shall use its available resources to—

- (c) *ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.*

Guidance should be a whole school activity that is integrated into all school programmes. Each school is expected to develop a school guidance plan as part of its School Plan and this plan should include provision for supporting the needs of pupils at junior cycle. The Department asks that schools should, as far as possible, utilise the additional guidance allocation granted under this circular to focus on guidance provision at junior cycle. While the school's guidance planning should involve the guidance counsellor/s in the first instance, other members of school staff and management also have key roles

to play. Parents and students must be seen as an essential part of this process. Representatives of the local community, especially local business, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Educational Welfare Board and other relevant agencies should be consulted and involved as appropriate.

2. Allocation of hours for the provision of guidance in schools

- 2.1 All second-level schools in the Free Education Scheme/Block Grant Scheme qualify for an allocation of hours in respect of guidance, in accordance with Schedule A below. Schools not in these schemes qualify for an allocation in accordance with Schedule B.

Schedule A	
Enrolment	Allocation (hours per week)
1000+	47
900-999	38
800-899	36
700-799	30
600-699	28
500-599	24
400-499	17
300-399	13
200-299	11
<200	8

Schedule B	
Schools with 500 or more pupils	22 hours/week
Schools in the 350-499 enrolment category	11 hours/week

- 2.2 The allocation of these hours to an individual school in any particular school year will be determined by the recognised pupil enrolment (including recognised PLC pupils) at the end of September of the preceding year.
- 2.3 Some schools may have previously been allocated posts/hours in response to particular needs and/or as part of the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI). Such posts/hours will continue to be

allocated to schools for the 2005/06 school year and will be taken into account in determining a school's allocation on foot of the revised schedule. Thus a school will get the difference between its present allocation and its entitlement under the revised allocation schedule.

- 2.4 An individual school management may allocate, at its own discretion, additional hours from within normal teacher allocation to guidance.
- 2.5 Continued allocation of hours for guidance under this circular will be conditional on:
 - a guidance plan being part of the School Plan which is reviewed annually by school management and staff
 - the guidance plan taking account of the context of the school and, to the extent possible, providing for the guidance needs of all students to be met through the integration of guidance into all school programmes and student support measures in the school.

3. Conditions of appointment of Guidance Counsellors

- 3.1 Given the broad range of activities it encompasses, guidance in addition to being a specialist area, is also a whole school activity and so will engage a range of staff members, parents and community agencies as well as the young people themselves.
- 3.2 The guidance counsellor's time will be allocated to a range of guidance activities, including work with individual students, group or class contact and other support activities. The school guidance plan should ensure that all students can avail of a developmental guidance programme. The documents *Planning the School Guidance Programme*¹ and *Guidelines for Second - Level Schools on the implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act (1998), relating to students' access to appropriate guidance*² should be referred to in the preparation of the school guidance plan.
- 3.3 A guidance counsellor should be a qualified second-level teacher and in addition, should hold a qualification in guidance in accordance with section 4 below.

4. Recognised Courses

- 4.1 The following post-graduate courses are currently recognised by the Department of Education and Science as providing a qualification acceptable for school guidance work:
 - Higher Diploma in Guidance and Counselling - University College Cork (UCC)
 - Higher Diploma in School Guidance and Counselling – National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUI M)

¹ *Planning the School Guidance Programme –National Centre for Guidance in Education, 2004*

² *Guidelines for Second-Level Schools on the implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act (1998), relating to students' access to appropriate guidance –Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science, 2005.*

- Masters in Education with specialisation in Guidance and Counselling- The University of Dublin, Trinity College (TCD)
 - M. Sc. In Educational Guidance and Counselling – Mode B (TCD)
 - Post graduate Diploma in Guidance Counselling - University of Limerick (UL)
- 4.2 The courses leading to the following qualifications have been discontinued. However, the qualifications continue to be recognised for guidance counsellors:
- Masters Degree in Family Counselling -Guidance and Counselling Specialisation (Marino Institute of Education)
 - Diploma in Career Guidance/ Higher Diploma in Careers Guidance -University College Dublin (UCD)
 - Diploma in Guidance and Counselling (Mater Dei Institute)
- 4.3 Other qualifications which are deemed equivalent to those listed at paragraph 4.1 above may also be recognised by the Department. Requests for recognition of qualifications should be made to Post-Primary Qualifications Section, Department of Education and Science, Cornamaddy, Athlone, at least three months in advance of the beginning of the school year in which it is intended to commence employment.
5. You are requested to ensure that copies of this circular are provided to the appropriate representatives of parents and teachers for transmission to individual parents and teachers.
6. Queries concerning this circular letter should be e-mailed to allocations@education.gov.ie

A. Barrett
Principal Officer (Acting)

Date 26 May 2005.