



Lárionad Náisiúnta um Threoir san Oideachas  
National Centre for Guidance in Education



# Guidance Related Learning for Junior Cycle

# Report

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## NCGE

**The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education, with responsibility to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education and to inform the policy of the Department in the field of guidance. Our mission is to develop, support and influence guidance policy and quality guidance provision in the education and training sector as part of lifelong learning in accordance with national and international best practice.**

Guidance in post-primary schools within the lifelong context is aimed at students from the ages of 12 to 18 and relates to programmes equivalent to levels 3 to 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications. The Guidance programme is provided to both junior and senior cycle students. Guidance is an entitlement in post-primary schools as per the Education Act (1998) Section 9 which states that a school shall use its available resources to *'ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.'*

The Guidance related learning resources were developed in support of the provision of Whole School Guidance at Junior Cycle.

## CareersPortal

CareersPortal.ie is Ireland's National Career Guidance website, providing the most up-to-date and relevant career information and resources to those needing or providing career guidance. CareersPortal.ie was developed by Durrow Communications Ltd as a direct response to a report generated by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) in 2007, which recommended that Ireland develop a central career guidance portal. The site was officially launched by the Minister for Education and Science in April 2008.

The site has become an integral tool for guidance professionals throughout the country. It is supported by both public and private organisations, who partner with CareersPortal to help disseminate the most useful and up to date information about careers and courses across all sectors of the economy. Partners range from national advisory bodies and authorities to professional membership or representative bodies, government agencies, key public and private organisations, Colleges of Further Education, Higher Educational Institutes and Apprenticeship providers and government departments.

The CareersPortal.ie website and guidance resources has grown hugely, both in content, and in its user base since its launch in 2008 and is now receiving over 4 million-page impressions a month. The site provides up-to-date and relevant careers information and guidance materials to:

- Post primary students
- Early School Leavers
- College Students and Graduates
- Adult Learners
- Parents and Guardians
- Guidance/Teaching Professionals
- Teachers and Tutors in Education
- Jobseekers and their support services
- Information Providers

## Introduction

Guidance Counselling in post-primary schools in Ireland is legislated for in the Education Act (1998) wherein it is noted that Guidance is an entitlement in post-primary schools and that a school shall use its available resources to ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices (Section 9c). In 2017, the provision of Guidance became more specific in relation to Junior Cycle post-primary schools as it was stated in circular 0055/2019 that the Junior Cycle programme ‘must include guidance education.’ (DES, 2019 p7.).

This report provides an overview of planning and preparation of Guidance Related Learning at Junior Cycle by both NCGE and CareersPortal. It outlines the decision to collaborate on the development and promotion of these materials. Finally, a report based on an initial evaluation of the Guidance Related Learning (GRL) resources for Junior Cycle is outlined.

This report has been generated in order to inform relevant parties of all aspects of the development of the GRL resources. In addition, it is aimed that the points made in this report will provide areas of reflection if the GRL resources are to undergo a second phase of development.

## A need for Junior Cycle Resources

A formalised need for Junior Cycle resources in relation to Guidance was developed within the post-primary guidance community subsequently to the publication of Circular 0055/2019. This need was reported to NCGE at various events including the Whole School Guidance CPD which took place in 11 venues across Ireland in 2019 and 2020.

In addition, in 2019, the Guidance Programme Coordinator of post-primary met with NCCA who noted the absence of a unit of learning in the area of Guidance at that time.

NCGE conducted three focus groups in January 2020; one focus group included six post-primary Transition year students, the second and third focus group involved a total of eight Guidance Counsellors. From these focus groups, NCGE learned what students and Guidance Counsellors would find helpful in terms of GRL for Junior Cycle.

Since the launch of the new Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme, CareersPortal had been contacted by many post primary Guidance Counsellors requesting bespoke vocational resources for junior cycle guidance related learning. In 2019, CareersPortal formed an advisory group of post-primary guidance counsellors, involved in the delivery of junior cycle wellbeing and guidance related learning activities to consult them on their needs and challenges experienced in delivering the required activities. It emerged from the advisory group that although there were many resources in the area/topic of 'Wellbeing' there were limited guidance related resources on vocational learning and development.

## Collaboration

In response to this reported need, NCGE convened a working group in November 2019 to include JCT, NCCA, IGC. This working group met on one occasion but was not in a position to proceed with a second meeting. NCCA noted they would support the development of the 'Appendix I' document in relation to the planning and quality assurance of the resources. JCT proposed that they would review the final draft of the GRL content once it was completed.

In February 2020, CareersPortal and NCGE began to collaborate on the Junior Cycle Guidance Related Learning (GRL) content to maximise the efficiency, quality and effectiveness of the content. NCGE contracted an external consultant who designed the lesson content, and a graphic designer who created high-quality and visually engaging resources. CareersPortal and NCGE liaised on all

elements of these new resources. This included reflecting on class topics, discussing the student worksheets and reviewing all aspects of the lesson plans and resources.

CareersPortal designed and developed a new area on their site to house the lesson content and resources and created a new free innovative bespoke Junior Cycle Career File for 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> year students that could migrate to a free senior cycle career file or to the REACH+ career and college preparation programme. This aim of this is was to encourage the development of digital literacy and career management skills at a much younger age.

NCGE liaised with the NCCA on the development of the 'Appendix I' documents and JCT later provided comments on the final version of the resources.

## **GRL Resources: An outline of the 'package'**

Three units of learning containing a total of 18 lessons were created in this first phase of development. Each of the three units of learning contained six lessons which were created for each of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year groups. Each of the three units of learning was framed by an 'Appendix I' document. Units of learning were designed to be flexible in terms of their content; in line with the Whole School Guidance Framework (2017) it was noted that teachers and Guidance Counsellors could teach this content in schools. In addition, as a unit of learning the content of the lessons was developed so that it could be accessed in an 'a la carte' fashion, in line with the needs of the school. Simultaneously however, the content of each lesson complemented the other lessons in the unit. The units of learning themselves were created to reflect the definition of guidance in terms of 'a range of learning experiences provided in developmental sequence, that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance' (DES, 2005, pg. 4).

Each lesson, provided in English and as *Gaeilge* contained a comprehensive package including a lesson plan for the teacher, a presentation for the classroom and individual student worksheets. *An outline of all content is listed on the next page.*

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Year</b>	Lesson Plan (PDF)	Presentation (PDF)	Worksheet (Word & PDF)	Additional
My Goal Setting	✓	✓	✓	
My Pathways	✓	✓	✓	
My School Supports (Part 1)	✓	✓	✓	
My School Supports (Part 2)	✓	✓	✓	
My School Year	✓	✓	✓	Suggested answers (PDF)
My Values	✓	✓	✓	

**Appendix I (1<sup>st</sup> Year) – ‘Making the transition into first year’**

<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Year</b>	Lesson Plan (PDF)	Presentation (PDF)	Worksheet (Word & PDF)	Additional
My SMART Goals	✓	✓	✓	
My Identity	✓	✓	✓	
My Mindset	✓	✓	✓	
My Unique Values	✓	✓	✓	
My Pathways	✓	✓	✓	
My Voice (Presentations)	✓	✓	✓	

**Appendix I (2<sup>nd</sup> Year) – ‘Exploring who I am and my personal goals’**

<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Year</b>	Lesson Plan (PDF)	Presentation (PDF)	Worksheet (Word & PDF)	Additional
My Balanced Life	✓	✓	✓	
My Exploration of Careers	✓	✓	✓	
My Options	✓	✓	✓	
My Skills	✓	✓	✓	Teacher’s Answers (PDF)
My Subject Choice	✓	✓	✓	
Presenting Me	✓	✓	✓	

**Appendix I (3<sup>rd</sup> Year) – ‘Considering my present and my future’**

## Launch of GRL Resources

The GRL resources were officially launched on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020 through the provision of a national webinar on the content. Here, the NCGE Programme Coordinator for post-primary provided an overall policy context for the resources and the NCGE External Consultant presented the content of the GRL resources at large. The Education & Guidance Liaison Manager with CareersPortal presented on the location of the resources on CareersPortal and the potential to create an individualised Junior Cycle Career File that will migrate seamlessly to their Senior Cycle Career File or REACH+ Career File. The location of the resources on the NCGE website was also outlined.

156 participants attended the 'live' GRL launch webinar.

In addition, by the date of completion of this report the recording of this webinar was accessed by 83 unique viewers subsequently to the live event.

The presentation of the webinar was downloaded 195 times and the subsequent document 'A Guide to Accessing GRL resources' was downloaded 103 times.

## Access of Resources from 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept – 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2020

### NCGE:

Analysis of NCGE statistics on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2020 identified that the GRL content was accessed as follows in Table 1:

**Table 1: Unique Events (number of times content was downloaded for each year group)**

Event Label	Unique Events/ Page Impressions
1st Year (English)	569
1st Year (Gaeilge)	34
2nd Year (English)	356
2nd Year (Gaeilge)	30
3rd Year (English)	398
3rd Year (Gaeilge)	35
<b>Total Unique Events</b>	1422

**From Table 1 it is clear that the first-year content was most heavily accessed (42% of total access through the NCGE website)**

## CareersPortal:

### Site Stats:

- **Student Community Area: 1,549** Page Impressions/Downloads
- **Student Career File: 980** Student Documents Uploaded
- Resources Page for Students: **8,103** Page Impressions/Downloads
- **Guidance/Teaching Professionals Area (English): 2,950** Page Impressions/Downloads
- **Guidance/Teaching Professionals Area (Saoloibre) 92** Page Impression/Downloads – (note went live early December)

### Support:

- Support calls from numerous teachers and Guidance Counsellors. The vast majority of the calls were in relation to local technical issues. One school/1 user had over 20+ support calls which were all in relation to local/software issues.

## Combined Observations: A collaborative approach to Access

As noted, a collaborative approach to accessing the GRL resources was provided by NCGE and Careers Portal.

Resources can be accessed through the following links:

- **NCGE**  
[www.ncge.ie/resources](http://www.ncge.ie/resources)
- **Careers Portal**  
Guidance/Teaching Professionals: [click here](#)  
Junior Cycle Students: [click here](#)  
School Community page for those who do not wish to register [click here](#)

As may be observed from the links above, the NCGE provides a general link for Guidance Counsellors to access content. Careers Portal offers dual access for Guidance Counsellors and students. This unique feature allows students to begin the process of developing their own individual career management skills at Junior Cycle.

NCGE and CareersPortal shared two general observations in the provision of the GRL content:

1. In consideration of the overall content of GRL, the 1<sup>st</sup> year content was most regularly utilised on both platforms.
2. While some Guidance Counsellors were comfortable accessing the digitalised resources, others seemed to lack the confidence and competence in accessing the material. This indicates that some Guidance Counsellors could benefit from CPD in the area of digital literacy.

The survey of evaluation (next section) provides additional information with regard to the access of the resources.

## Survey of evaluation: Introduction

A survey of evaluation was distributed to all Guidance Counsellors through an NCGE Bulletin in early November 2020. A reminder was sent towards the end of November. This early evaluation was carried out in order to measure the initial impact of the GRL content in post-primary schools in Ireland. A total of 21 Guidance Counsellors completed the evaluation. The results from the survey are displayed below.

### i) Utilisation of content:

In Question 1, Guidance Counsellors were asked to indicate the year group they have used the material with. Responses are presented in Table 2 below. It should be noted that some Guidance Counsellors selected multiple boxes as they utilised the resources with more than one year group.

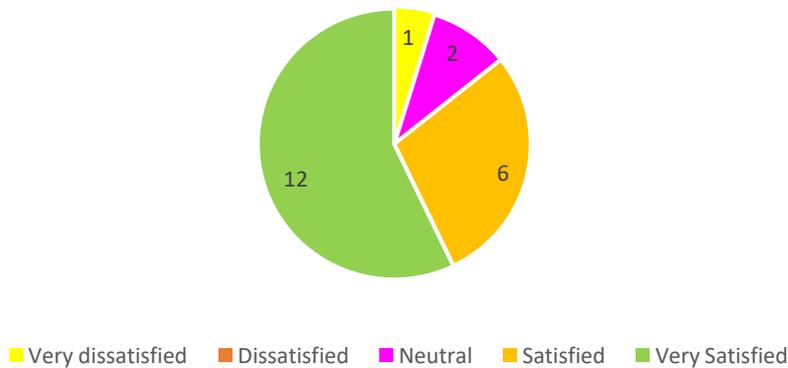
**Table 2: Number of Guidance Counsellors accessing each unit of learning.**

Unit of Learning	1st year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year
Number of Guidance Counsellors using the GRL resources with each year group	16	10	11

### ii) Satisfaction with content

Guidance Counsellors were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with these resources in general as the classroom teacher? (1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being very satisfied). Figure 1 illustrates the responses:

**Figure 1: Overall satisfaction with these resources as the classroom teacher**

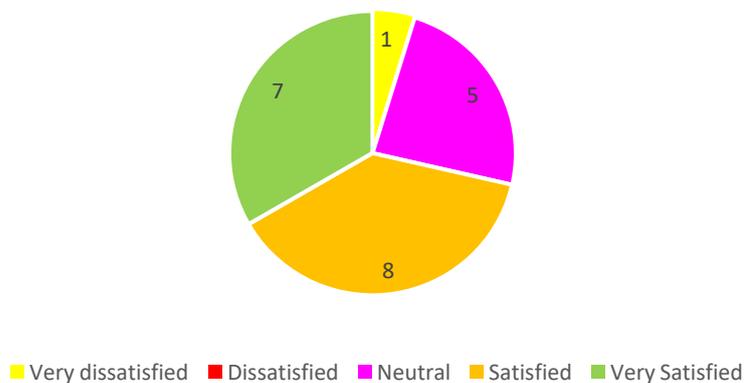


As noted in Figure 1, 18 out of the 21 Guidance Counsellors noted they were satisfied or very satisfied with the resources overall. One Guidance Counsellor noted the following in relation to their satisfaction with the 1<sup>st</sup> year resources:

‘I think the resources are perfectly pitched for 1st year in the early transition to secondary school. The intention is to progress the programme into 2nd and 3rd as the current 1st years transition up the school. I have found students very happy to engage in discussions, with whatever unit I have done so far. The 'Worry bag' exercise was just a fantastic way for students to help students deal with any concerns they may have.’

Figure 2 illustrates the general level of satisfaction of the students with regard to the GRL resources, in the view of Guidance Counsellors:

**Figure 2: Overall level of satisfaction of students, in the view of the Guidance Counsellor**



Similarly, to Figure 1, 15 of the 21 Guidance Counsellors believe students are satisfied or very satisfied with the resources.

In addition, it is noted that 18 of the 21 Guidance Counsellors agreed that the content of the resources was pitched at the correct level.

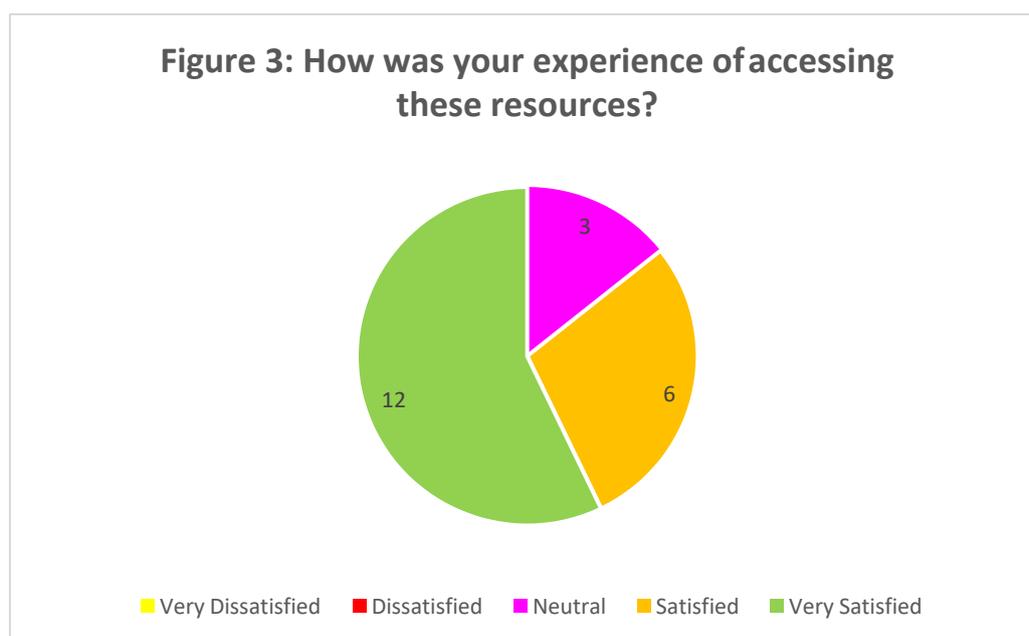
Regarding the content of the resources, Guidance Counsellors noted the following when they were asked 'how could the content of these resources be improved?':

- 'The content for 1st years is fair - it's a little puerile if I'm honest. A bit babyish. I felt that there was a huge gap between the IT literacy required of the student & the content of the first-year programme. Many 1st years have never sent an email before & also, they are just getting used to their iPad in term one.'
- '...there's lots of crossover with SPHE & Wellbeing. ... there's no need for duplication e.g., SMART goals.'
- 'I've just started the Second-Year programme - I will see how this goes from now until Christmas. I will be modifying the course content myself & I have allowed 2 extra classes for IT issues. so that I have a bit of wriggle room.'
- 'How to be an Effective Learner...Difference between Homework and Study. how to complete an effective study plan...JC Key Skills explained and the Grading System at JC. .. a little on wellbeing, age-appropriate techniques for those times when they feel anxious.'
- 'While I generally found the topics and content to be good, I felt the graphics were a bit juvenile for the 3rd Years I was using the resources with. I think enhanced visuals and graphics would really improve the impact of the resources.'
- 'More worksheets/ activity resources that can be shared with students.'
- 'Student support lessons are repetitive, too similar to each other, but the 4 other lessons are good.'
- 'The first-year story about Edmund the Elephant I felt was not as in tune as the other content and a little childish for this age group.'
- 'Have a site to login to for the students with worksheets.'
- 'Consider the software available on student phones for upload and download as we cannot get to the computer room.'
- 'If there were a few more topics included it would make provision of guidance classes in junior cycle a lot easier and steam lined'.
- 'Aim at hour long classes, more materials etc.'
- 'More relevant and realistic, like resources you would use in primary school. Worksheets in most cases for the sake of doing something. Students didn't engage.'
- 'Second year set assumes you have completed first year set and my second years hadn't. I had to dip into first year resources for second years.'
- 'The ppt does not run as a PowerPoint, so to be able to run it in normal fashion would be good.'

### iii) Access

From the survey of evaluation, 12 of the 21 Guidance Counsellors completing the survey accessed the content through the NCGE website, while the other 9 Guidance Counsellors accessed the content through the CareersPortal website. Of those 9 Guidance Counsellors who accessed the content through CareersPortal, 5 asked their students to create a profile.

In terms of accessing the resources, Guidance Counsellors rated their level of satisfaction as illustrated in Figure 3:



Interestingly, one Guidance Counsellor noted that their Deputy Principal provided her with the resources.

While a majority of Guidance Counsellors were satisfied in terms of their experience of accessing the resources, they made the following observations/comments about how accessibility could be improved:

With regard to improving CareersPortal accessibility:

- 'There were accessibility issues. Students logged into their accounts & very often the resources weren't there for them to work on. This happened on several occasions to multiple students at a time.'
- 'I got my 3rd years to join Careers Portal, but the documents could not be uploaded with content in them. Extra additional software was necessary.'

- 'I needed at least one extra class if not two to set up usernames & passwords properly. Also, I didn't know that we had to get Adobe reader installed on their iPad so that they could work on the worksheets. This was another technical issue. Furthermore, it was a nightmare for any student with an additional need - I have 31 SEN students -approx. 6 SEN students per class. Is there any provision made for these students? I recommend that the software is made more user friendly. It is WAAAAAY too complicated for them to navigate. Remember first years are only 12 years old. At least 50% of our time was spent dealing with technical issues & students being unable to find where they needed to be on the site.'

With regard to improving NCGE accessibility:

- 'A front-page link would make it easier.'
- 'Initially I found them easy to find and download on the NCGE website. However, when I went looking for them at a later stage they seemed to have been moved. I couldn't find them at first and had to search a couple of times to find them.'
- 'unzipping the resources took time.'
- 'Careers Portal is easier to navigate.'
- 'Excellent through careersportal. I tried once through NCGE and it didn't work.'
- 'I found downloading the ZIP file did not work - I could not save it as a file on my cloud. This means I have to go in to the NCGE site every time I want to download all class documents.'

#### iv) Additional Observations / Comments

Guidance Counsellors noted the following observations in relation to the GRL overall:

- 'I found the resources easy to find, however the slideshow is in pdf format and I had to search for a pdf to ppt converter to show it as a slideshow.'
- 'a great source of conversation, particularly in relation to subject choice for senior cycle.'
- 'Might be useful to circulate on other platforms as I found them through communication as a guidance counsellor.'
- 'It would be great if the presentations were in PowerPoint format - as that would make clicking into any websites or videos much easier.'
- 'The content is really excellent and a similar set of resources for senior students would be fantastic.'

## v) Future Evaluation of GRL

It is proposed that focus groups with (i) students and (ii) Guidance Counsellors, could be facilitated in order to continue to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of these resources. In the survey, one third of guidance counsellors (7 out of 21) agreed they would be willing to circulate a link to their students to evaluate the resources. In addition, 12 of the 21 Guidance Counsellors noted they would take part in a focus group further evaluating the content, if they were invited.

One Guidance Counsellor noted:

‘I have included another unit to the wellbeing -GRL myself...relating how to be an effective learner, designing a Study Plan, and outlining the JC Key Skills and Grading System. These might be suggestions for extending the programme.’

## Reflections, Conclusions and Recommendations

Although the numbers of Guidance Counsellors completing this evaluation is low (n=21), the data gathered is rich in content. Reflecting on this data at large, the following conclusions are noted, and recommendations are added where appropriate:

- i) It is noted that both Guidance Counsellors and subject teachers can teach GRL in the context of the whole school guidance approach. Hence it is possible that in distributing the survey to Guidance Counsellors only, there is a gap in terms of feedback. Perhaps school management may provide additional insight into the use of these resources.
- ii) Overall satisfaction with the content of these resources is evident. However, Guidance Counsellors have provided ample scope for how these units of learning could be extended/reflected upon further.
- iii) In general, Guidance Counsellors report they were satisfied in relation to access of the resources. However, there are suggestions for both NCGE and CareersPortal in relation to how this may be improved.
- iv) During the course of the roll out of GRL, it was observed by NCGE and CareersPortal that the IT skills of Guidance Counsellors were varied in terms of competence, application and confidence.
- v) This quantitative evaluation should ideally be followed by focus groups with Guidance Counsellors and students to further evaluate all aspects of GRL.

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