

Record of the proceedings of the National Forum on Guidance 16th October 2012

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Terms of Reference

Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society (National Guidance Forum Report 2007)¹.

The aim of the National Forum on Guidance is to provide a forum for dialogue, exchanging information and exploring possibilities for co-operation and co-ordination.

(Discussions are informed by National Priorities, activities of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network² (ELGPN) and developments in guidance in line with EU Council Resolution 2008³ and Education and Training “ET” 2020⁴).

Specifically, the aims of the National Forum on Guidance include:

1. Communication:

- To enter dialogue on issues of importance in guidance nationally (including areas such as quality assurance and use of ICT in guidance)
- To share information on good practice in guidance
- To formalise networking at national level to support networking at regional and local level

2. Co-operation and Co-ordination

- To explore opportunities and develop mechanisms for referral
- To explore opportunities for co-operation and integrated approaches across a lifelong guidance framework between the various guidance providers

3. Representation

Representatives were invited from the various guidance organisations, institutes, and associations from both the education and the labour market guidance sectors and other relevant stakeholder organisations and agencies. (Example: NCGE, FÁS, IGC (to include post primary and PLC sector), private practice, AEGAI, Association of Higher Education Careers Services (AHECS), LES, Directors of Studies of GC, NEPS, DES Inspectorate and DSP). Guest speakers from relevant key stakeholder groups were invited to attend the meetings and/or speak on relevant topics to inform group discussions. (Example: IVEA, IBEC, Parents groups etc.)

¹ Guidance for Life, An Integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland. National Guidance Forum Report 2007. (www.nationalguidanceforum.ie)

² <http://ktl.jyu.fi/ktl/elgpn>

³ EU Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies. 2905th Education Youth and Culture meeting. 21 November 2008 http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/104236.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc28_en.htm

Meeting held on October 16th 2012 – Theme ‘Managing Expectations’

Part One:

In the first section of the meeting, participants were asked to reflect on usual familiar patterns in the world of guidance. In particular, they were asked to imagine if a film was being made about ‘Guidance’ – what would feature in the screenplay?

(The answers from six separate discussion tables have been amalgamated into the collective response below – n.b. this probably needs more work before being commissioned as an actual film!)

The film might begin with someone walking through an office door saying :
“I was told to come to you”

Then in speeded up motion lots of doors and paths opening to them as a result of the conversation

Back with the Guidance Counsellor, we would have this image of a busy, busy, busy person in a tidy, but chaotic and small office and a subtitled question *‘If the service isn’t seen to respect the worker, then how can people see it respects them?’* - We would see images of other services with their shiny new Celtic tiger buildings and the guidance counsellor in the portacabin at the back.

The Guidance Counsellor would talk about the reality of being massively understaffed, of people coming in, some expecting jobs, of needing to work with people on their self-esteem and personal development and not having the time. A powerful narrator voice might say *“never mind all that, we need to streamline the services”*

The screen would be filled with a succession of questions coming out of thought bubbles from the Guidance Counsellor :

“What is Guidance for?”

“Who is taking the decisions? Where’s the power?”

“Where’s the vision and ethos that would get buy-in and motivate people like me?”

“Does the management know what it is doing?”

“How does policy relate to practice in the real world?”

The questions would fade into images of frustration and tension and the fog of confusion and then as the Guidance Counsellor re-composes themself, they would say :

‘When the going gets tough, I always remember it is the client / practitioner relationship, at the heart of everything we do ! Listening. Trusting. Respecting. Empowering – that’s what gets me energised’

A voiceover voice would give some facts on the enormous range of information sources used by Guidance Counsellors.

A series of clients would talk about their experience of being empowered – of appreciating new sides of themselves – of being enabled to take the decisions they needed to take

The voiceover would conclude by illustrating the quantity and range of clients seen by Guidance Counsellors.

Participants were then asked to start work on the sequel, set 3-5 years later and imagining that things had progressed well – How would 'Guidance 2' be different from the first film ?

The sequel begins with a nightmare scenario :

All funding and supports have been withdrawn – there are no Guidance Counsellors left in any formal settings – surreptitious meetings take place in coffee shops and libraries.....

Fortunately this was just a bad dream, in reality policy discussions had recognised the positive value of Guidance in terms of confidence, mental health and a well-functioning economy and society

With support from the EU and national policy, services had become progressively more and more joined up, starting from the bottom up, sharing resources effectively wherever possible, making the very best use of technology.

Services were co-located and integrated wherever possible, set in holistic settings suitable for the work, giving clear messages to users re what was on offer and maintaining flexibility to individual needs.

There was a new compassion towards unemployed people with services geared up to help people find the way to activate the best contribution they could make to society

Changes in the Junior Cert Curriculum had heralded a new age of self-reflection and self-awareness, supported by second level Guidance Counsellors

Many, many people offered themselves as mentors and supports in a massive gesture of social solidarity – schools had extensive local support networks that they could call on.

Employer networks were actively involved in forecasting needs locally and nationally.

All systems showed more flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs of individuals

There was more awareness about the importance of work being a satisfying part of a balanced life and a contribution to a potentially a better society – (one comment - *thank you President Michael D!*)

Guidance Counsellors had developed structures so that they were able to speak with one voice and contribute to a vision for society, political decisions and curriculum development. There was agreement on a set of key performance indicators and the wide economic and societal benefits of Guidance were being made abundantly clear.

Individual Guidance Counsellors were still focussed on the importance of individual relationships.

Guidance has become a lifelong and life-wide service.

The third round of conversations built on the previous exercises and focussed in on the core theme of '**Managing Expectations**', looking at how things could be improved in terms of four sets of expectations :

- (i) Expectations of self**
- (ii) Expectations of clients**
- (iii) Expectations of Managers**
- (iv) Expectations of other stakeholders**

(i) Expectations of self

Key message – in challenging times, you need to be clear with yourself and your client what you can offer

It's a question of personal and professional survival. It begins with being clear, who we are and what is our role?

We tend to have unrealistic expectations of ourselves. We are human. We all carry our own baggage and go through anger, frustration, tension and fear just like anyone else.

In a changing economic landscape, we all have to accept there are no guarantees.

We need to name that there is a tendency to have high expectations of ourselves and be realistic in saying '*this is what I can do ...*'

We need to make explicit the huge body of knowledge that exists in the Guidance sector and work to protect and enhance that further.

(ii) Expectations of clients

Key messages

The Guidance Relationship is established based on a clear idea of clients needs and expectations, but needs to be tempered by what is possible given the constraints of time and the remit of the organisation

Manage Self. Manage Change. Manage Career.

n.b . It makes a difference whether the client has been sent or come of their own accord

There is a potential trap where a client begins by wanting to know what they 'should' do.

We need to be clear what we are there for and how we operate in order to be able to give clients clear expectations of how decision-making happens.

There should be a clear statement of service (and limitations).

We should develop FAQ's for websites to help clients with steps they can take before appointments.

We should signpost e-guidance and make clear how it differs from face to face services.

When we discover their expectations, we need to be real about what is possible within available time and our remit.

We need to be clear re what is expected of clients, i.e. what we need in order to help them

We need quality CPD.

(iii) Expectations of Managers

Key message: We need to shift Manager's understanding of the contribution of guidance from a focus on targets and resources to a more holistic understanding and measurement of output.

Core dilemma: The focus tends to be on what is measured – this conflicts with our aspirations to work in a more holistic way.

(iv) Expectations of other stakeholders

i.e. Business, Trade Unions, EU, Politicians, SOLAS, "organisations", legislators, IBEC, those who influence government, parents

Key message: there is a big job to help all these people to be informed of what the role of guidance is and is not.

(all in the context of a culture where the view of guidance is dominated by the CAO system)

Part Two: Forward Looking

After lunch, the group formed into four sub-groups to examine:

‘What can realistically happen in the next 12 months?’ -

(Picking up from discussions in previous forum meetings)

Discussions focussed on:

- a) **Career Management Skills**
- b) **Quality Assurance in Guidance**
- c) **Access to Guidance Services**
- d) **Co-operation and Co-ordination**

- a) **Career Management Skills**

Key Action: Introduce the framework of CMS into the curriculum across all levels of education

(Guiding Question - using Canadian Blueprint – how do these skills become embedded in the curriculum and support?)

Need to introduce role models if not supported from home

Need to influence the training of teachers

Need to promote the concept of employability – starting early in primary schools with sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes and the meta-skill : ‘how do you deploy the other skills that you have ?’

Need to work with Guidance Practitioners and train them in the method

(NYCI have tools and training aids)

Introducing the ‘Manage Your Career’ framework and method – beginning early as subject choices affect your career and helping people to develop their capacity to adapt skills and direction

Guidance Counsellors need career management for themselves - CPD required :

- to develop skills for the job now and for the future
- to keep up to date with academic and practitioner research
- to widen out guidance – increase adaptability / flexibility

- b) **Quality Assurance in Guidance**

Key Action : Better definition and use of medium and long-term indicators (sustainable guidance), using information technology as evaluative tool to produce qualitative and quantitative data

There is a need to develop a culture of colleagues working together – practitioners and assessors collaborating

Case studies are valuable

Clients need to be involved in the process

There is a mind-shift needed to help people accept and get used to self-evaluation and feedback as positive constructive processes – this needs to start slowly and be followed by honest, reflective discussion

Referrals are one measure of success

Practitioner standards / qualifications are a starting point

CPD and quality information are required

Need to promote a critical approach to web info (also helping clients to evaluate info)

There is a need for qualitative and quantitative engagement (see AMOSSHE toolkit)

c) Access to Guidance Services

Key Action : There needs to be a national strategy to raise awareness of services and the profile of guidance

Ideas include an app, a National Guidance Day (combining national media and local events), tying in more with Citizen's Information Service, national web resources listing services for each client type, short videos demystifying the process and making clear accessibility (including for demystifying language for parents)

Make sure service is not seen as elitist

App would include interactive elements and ability to pinpoint your local service (google maps)

Strategy would be supported by Guidance Partnerships / Networks who would facilitate signposting

Citizens Information should be invited to join forum to explore potential synergies

All school staff need CPD in whole school role and career related learning

d) Co-operation and Co-ordination

Key Actions:

- **Promote co-operation and co-ordination through local networks and national policy**
- **Define and describe provision and current gaps in provision for all client groups**
- **Develop a national vision for guidance provision based on a discussion of citizenship, employability and personal responsibility**

The emphasis must be on this being driven from the bottom up to maximise willingness

Acknowledge real fears of potentially losing out as co-operation and co-ordination grows

Discussions should ideally take place in a larger, wider context, as above, and not just be about guidance.

Reflections on the experience of the Forum

The final part of the day (16/10/12) considered what has been learnt from the experience of the Forum so far and where the focus needs to be from here on.

What has been most valuable in people's experience of the Forum to date?

The most commonly mentioned benefit was 'Networking'. Networking enabled people to broaden their perspectives and have a better understanding of the sector as a whole. People appreciated knowing that concerns were held in common and the opportunity to feed these concerns into the system.

The Forum had provided a place for discussing guidance as a whole – what it is, what it should be and how it needs to adapt given the times we are in. One person even mentioned that the forum had enabled him to realise how poor the profession's PR was and what needed to be done there.

Individuals had appreciated learning more about other services, the opportunity to clarify specific questions and to put their local experience into a national context.

People liked the mix of formal and informal

Building on that experience, people wanted to continue with wide invitations rather than pursuing an idea of designated representatives that wouldn't really work. They were keen to use ICT better to support the networking of information and specifically to make the link with Citizens' Information.

It was felt that an opportunity had been missed to clarify use of terminology (i.e. sometimes people appeared to be talking about the same thing, but were actually using language quite differently.)

It was also felt that there was more scope to use the Forum as a place for the sharing of practice.

Where does the attention of the Forum need to focus moving forward?

(this question was answered in small group discussions)

- Mapping and promoting the current landscape of guidance – legislative, EU, structural, regional
- The development of a National Policy Framework (nb tying in with EU Presidency Events)
- The profiling of guidance work and cost-effective services
- Making guidance more accessible and 'trendy' – changing the perceptions of guidance
- Continued opportunities for networking – suggest hosting rotates?
- Increasing awareness of research / evidence relating to guidance, especially from other countries