

Submission by the **Institute of Guidance Counsellors** in response to ***Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*** published by the Further Education Committee National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

Introduction

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) welcomes many of the progressive ideas outlined in this document: “Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training”. The Institute of Guidance Counsellors is committed to providing clear and effective pathways to lifelong and life wide employment.

“Colleges are committed to dynamic partnerships with stakeholders such as employers and business, employment and guidance services”. (NAPD. 2014 *Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*, p44)

The IGC require you to honour this commitment. We wish to be dynamic and effective in our provision of a guidance service. For this to happen we need adequate time to interface with our clients/students. Time to access their needs, their skills, to identify realistic opportunities and to guide and counsel them to move forward in their educational and vocational choices.

The proposal to ensure the delivery of flexible, tailored education and training programmes

Guidance counsellors commend the proposal by the NAPD that funding should encompass: “the delivery of flexible, tailored education and training programmes of varying duration and delivery modes in order to meet the needs of a wider target audience” (NAPD. 2014 *Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*, p10) This is a commendable practise which would make major strides in addressing the wide range of abilities and learning styles of potential students.

Life long guidance

“The Expert Group for Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) – places an emphasis on the value of education and training in aligning skills with the needs of enterprise. In order to re-enter the labour market and secure long-term employment, the working age population needs to be continuously retrained, upskilled, and educated”. (NAPD. 2014 *Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*, p13)

This resonates with the thesis for life-long guidance advocated in the ELGPN document presented/launched by the NCGE at their conference in 2013. Guidance counsellors working at 2nd, 3rd level and with the adult community are the best qualified personnel to ensure an optimum match between the skills of human resources and the needs of the labour market. Given our tacit knowledge of and exposure to the future workforce coupled with our thorough grasp of labour market forces, we are ideally positioned to deliver on the aims of this document. We are heartened by the NAPD’s recognition of the fact that guidance is a process not a one off event, and that

individuals will require access to a qualified guidance counsellor to guide them in their choices at different stages in their lifespan. This process of “aligning skills” requires time and appropriate access to individuals to facilitate the process of uncovering who they are, where their skills lie and untapping their full potential. This process will pay dividends to our economy only if job seekers are appropriately positioned in the labour market.

Personal, social, educational and career guidance

“Learners are supported to make informed course choices that suit their needs and their individual learning outcomes, whether academic, vocational or personal.” (NAPD. 2014 Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training, p17)

These priorities are directly aligned with the core principles of our engagement with our students and clients as we guide them through choices and transitions that are:

- Personal and social
- Educational
- Career

In our work we aim to address the needs of all in our care. We strive to “provide a balance in the personal and social, educational and career guidance offered.” (Planning the School Guidance Programme NCGE p17, 2004) These activities are synonymous and at times indistinguishable and it is typical that all of the above would be processed in any given appointment with a student. We would recommend that the NAPD acknowledge the value and need for one to one counselling that addresses the holistic person and is not merely confined to the vocational aspect of the individual. We are all winners when young people are appropriately situated in the labour market. Square pegs in round holes add a significant cost to the state and result in a plethora of related personal, social and educational problems as shown in the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) “Leaving School in Ireland: A Longitudinal Study Post Leaving Certificate Transitions” (McCoy, et al. 2014).

Issues of concern

The need for individual appointments with skilled, qualified guidance counsellor

“Progression rate to 3rd level will also have to increase from 55% to 72%”.(NAPD. 2014 Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training, p14)

The Guidance Counsellor plays a pivotal role in reducing the dropout rate of students from school / college and also in increasing progression to further education by providing educational and vocational guidance vis-à-vis course and college options. We are poised and ready to advise our students on ways to overcome the three barriers to increasing this progression rate:

- 1.Points
- 2.Finance

3. Student's expectations

We need appropriate and timely access to our student's to match them to the level of attainment best suited to their unique set of aptitudes, abilities, interests and personality. Without an encouraging voice and appropriate access to a skilled guidance counsellor many students will fail to recognise their own skills and will underachieve.

Stark high unemployment rates currently experienced by our young

"Colleges are committed to provision that enhances skills and competencies through participation on core full-time provision, in particular on programmes with a specific occupational employment" (NAPD. 2014 *Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*, p20)

The IGC are curious about how these skills and competencies re chosen? Who is consulted and what is the process involved?

"Colleges continuously participate in national, co-operative programme development...as well as labour market justification for course approval" (NAPD. 2014 *Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*, p20)

In response to this assertion the IGC questions why do we have so many students returning to us post FE courses when they fail to find employment. Why did 50, 000 non-nationals immigrate to Ireland in 2012 to fill jobs nationals were not qualified to fill whilst 80,000 nationals were emigrating to find work the same year? (OECD. 2013)

The future of Qualifax

"Entry and pathways are not always clear to prospective learners"(NAPD. 2014 *Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*, p9)

Qualifax is an essential tool of the guidance counsellor, with the current situation of information overload on the net students report great difficulty and frustration when researching entry routes to courses. The added value of Qualifax is that it is user friendly, well laid out, providing pertinent information pitched in an appropriate vernacular for its readership. The precarious future of Qualifax is a cause of great concern to Guidance Counsellors working with all age groups. No other career website distinguishes so clearly between the myriad of levels of courses, or is so easy to use by all age groups. Care should be taken to ensure that Qualifax is professionally maintained, remains accessible and available to all users in the public domain.

Conclusion

Lifelong guidance

“In the context of a knowledge economy and the needs of individuals to rapidly retrain to meet changing technology, markets and employment opportunities, colleges support the emergence of career management skills as central to personal management of non-linear careers pathways and the empowerment of individuals to manage their own learning and careers”. (NAPD. 2014 *Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*, p30)

If we are serious as a society about accommodating the *“empowerment of individuals to manage their own learning and careers”* the empowerment of guidance counsellors within all sectors to deliver their guidance function is a critical component of this process. We wish to meet with jobseekers and:

- conduct training needs analyses
- identify their existing career skills
- put in place a strategy which will allow them to set and attain training and vocational goals
- guide them towards an employment situation where they are competent, effective, a perfect fit
- provide greater connectivity between providers across all sectors

This process needs to be delivered by all educational providers, it is a lifelong process. The need for an integrated guidance approach and the introduction of an integrated model of guidance for the FE sector, including the development of national referral protocols between Adult Guidance Services and other national agencies was highlighted in the SOLAS report, 2014 – 2010.: An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS). The IGC endorses the development of a clearer roadmap for all involved in the FET sector.

References:

NAPD.(2014)*Realising Opportunities A Vision for Further Education and Training*

OECD.(2013)*Economic Surveys: Ireland 2013*

McCoy, et al. (2014)*Leaving School in Ireland: A Longitudinal Study Post Leaving Certificate Transitions*. Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

NCGE.(2004) *Planning the School Guidance Programme*

Submitted by: The Labour Market Subcommittee of the National Executive of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.