



Institute of Guidance Counsellors

**A WHOLE SCHOOL
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICE
AND CURRICULUM:
ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

**A Policy Paper of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors
March 2008**

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FOREWORD

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors is the professional body for guidance counsellors in Ireland and has been an active participant in the consultative process which accompanied the work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in the area of Guidance in Post-Primary Education. Following the publication of the NCCA Discussion Paper in October 2006 and its circulation in January 2007, the Council invited opinions from all stakeholders. The Institute sought submissions from its local branches and individual members with a view to making its own informed submission to the Council.

Much thought and effort has been expended by members of the Institute in relation to the guidance provision in post-primary schools since the publication of the Education Act in 1998 and in considering more recent publications such as the Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998 (DES, Dublin 2005), Planning the School Guidance Programme (NCGE/DES, Dublin 2004), and the Review of Guidance in Schools (DES, September 2006). It was no surprise, therefore, that when the NCCA consultative process was complete, 62% of submissions in response to the Discussion Document had come from guidance counsellors. This was evidence of the interest in, commitment to, and concern of practitioners to preserving the highest of standards in the provision of guidance and counselling services in schools.

Bearing in mind the training and expertise of its members, the Institute is in a strong position to make a meaningful contribution to discussions about Guidance and Counselling and this document is a case in point. It outlines the position of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors with respect to guidance in Post Primary Schools in terms of the NCCA Curriculum Framework while acknowledging the implications of the Education Act (1998). It is intended to help inform and shape government policy in this important area.

The Institute places a strong emphasis on the distinction which exists between the curricular elements of second-level guidance and the professional guidance service which is provided by the guidance counsellor, and argues that with proper resources a truly effective guidance service could be established in Ireland. The benefits of such a service are far-reaching and would have numerous positive effects on the country's socio-economic development as well as addressing other matters such as the mental health of our young people.

Frank Mulvihill
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Institute of Guidance Counsellors

March 2008

A WHOLE SCHOOL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICE AND CURRICULUM: ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

The development of a curricular programme as part of a school's response to the guidance and counselling needs of its students has been an active concern of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors since its foundation in the mid 1970s. In his Chairperson's address to Conference in 1977, Fr. John Bresnan praised the development of a Junior Cycle Programme for guidance. (Bresnan, 1977). In the first edition of the IGC "Role of the Guidance Counsellor" document in 1984, there was a detailed outline of a guidance curriculum for each year of second level schooling. Last year, in developing "A Curricular Framework for Guidance" the NCCA took an important, if imperfect, step forward, in recognising formally the personal, educational and vocational developmental needs of students, and the importance of proper curriculum planning in schools to meet those needs.

The NCCA Discussion paper *A Curriculum Framework for Guidance* raises issues that require a clear statement of the Institute of Guidance Counsellor's position on curriculum, and its role and place in the guidance and counselling service as it works to meet the demands of the Education Act, 1998. It is extremely important that our understanding of what is meant by a "curriculum" is clear and applied in a consistent manner. We appreciate the willingness of the NCCA, experts in the area of curriculum to assist in the development of **the curricular aspects** of the guidance programme. However, it

is our position that the NCCA does not appear to understand the service remit of the guidance and counselling service; therefore it is our intention in this policy paper to clarify our position on the role of curriculum development as an essential complement to the service elements of the guidance and counselling service in second level schools.

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING: A SERVICE AND A CURRICULAR PROGRAMME

The Education Act, 1998, paragraph 2, clearly defined the guidance and counselling provision in schools as a service. This is the starting point in our understanding of the remit of the guidance and counselling service in second level schools. The Education Act places the responsibility on schools to provide "access to appropriate guidance to assist (students) in their educational and career choices" and to "promote the...social and personal development of students". The school guidance and counselling service has a key role in schools' efforts to implement these requirements of the Education Act.

This key role has two distinct but complementary elements: firstly, the provision of a responsive service, staffed by trained guidance counsellors, to meet students' needs, as they emerge, throughout the student's time in school; and secondly, the development of a curricular programme which is developmental, preventative, appropriate to the needs of the students, and

delivered in an integrated and proactive manner in a whole school context. (Scottish Government Publications 2005). Guidance as a whole school enterprise has been emphasised by the Institute since its foundation (Murray, 1975). Most recently, the NCGE has reiterated the central principle of whole school planning for the effective development of the school guidance and counselling service. (NCGE, 2004).

The table on page six sets out in a diagrammatic form the components of what is meant by an Irish Guidance and

counselling service and programme in Irish Post-primary schools in a whole school context.

In the diagram below, guidance and counselling in the Irish context is understood as being made up of three separate, yet interlinked areas of

- Personal and Social Guidance and Counselling
- Educational Guidance and Counselling
- Vocational Guidance and Counselling¹

¹ The notion of the unity of career and personal counselling has been repeatedly reinforced in the professional literature Rak and O'Dell (1994) have demonstrated how career and "traditional" counselling approaches are blended in good vocational interventions.

Quoted in Career Guidance and Counselling Through the Lifespan, p. 603, Edwin L. Herr and Stanley H. Cramer (N.Y. Longman, 1996). See also *The Australian Blueprint For Career Development*, pps. 14 and 91. (Trial version, May 2006). Also see *Guidance For Life, The National Guidance Forum Report*, 2007, p. 14.

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TABLE 1

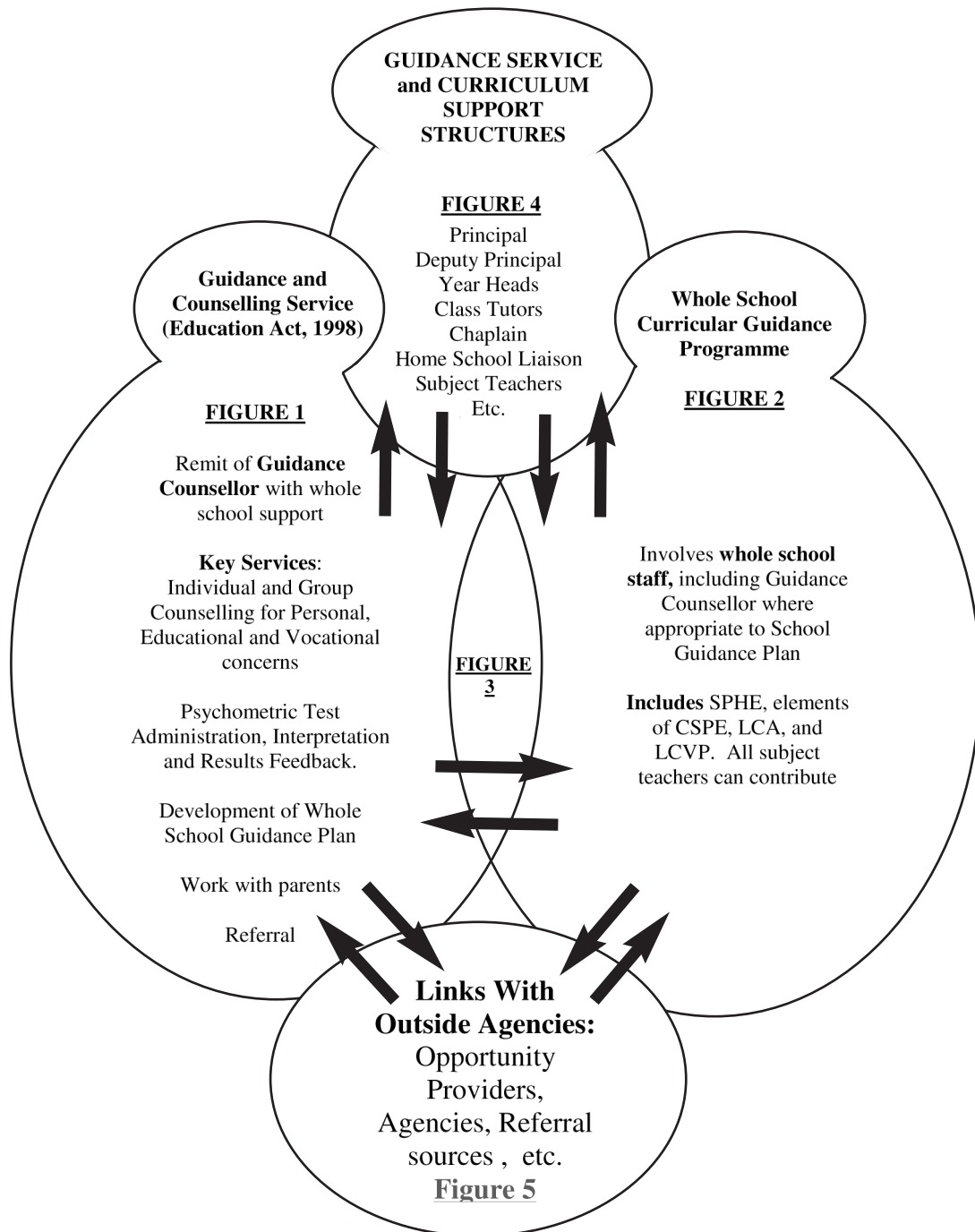


FIGURE 1 **THE SERVICE AREA**

An effective delivery of interventions to meet the personal, social, educational and career needs of students demands a clearly defined remit for the guidance and counselling service.

The guidance and counselling service is **a professional service** delivered by one or more qualified guidance counsellors, in a whole school context. It includes individual and small group interventions in one or more of the three areas of personal/social, educational and vocational concerns. It also includes referral and the administration, interpretation, and feedback of psychometric tests. This service is responsive to individual student needs as they arise, and these interventions cannot be placed in a curricular framework. They are not planned but are a front-line response to presenting student's concerns, where students self-refer, or are referred by others. The provision of personal counselling is a guidance intervention that cannot fit into a curricular structure in any meaningful way

FIGURE 2 **THE CURRICULAR AREA**

The White Paper on Education (1995, p. 18) defines the term "curriculum" as encompassing: "the content, structure and processes of teaching and learning which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and values." This includes the knowledge, concepts and skills that students acquire through the curricular programmes designed to meet their needs. The whole

school guidance programme has a **significant curricular component** which can be delivered by any member of staff, preferably with appropriate training in the specialised areas of curriculum delivery, e.g. as in S.P.H.E. The curricular components/or programme elements of the service have to be both pro-active and responsive in its work to meet student needs. It is in its proactive interventions that the service engages in developmental curricular programmes. This may be both in large group interventions, such as classroom programmes or in small group work. These interventions may be described as curricular in nature as they are planned, teacher initiated, and offered to a defined group of students with clear, pre-planned and reasonably specific outcomes. The emphasis on clear planning on a cross-curricular basis is essential. Curricular elements need to be identified clearly, with specific detail of which staff, in which subject areas, will present the guidance topic. In that process the guidance counsellor has a key overview role.

FIGURE 3: **THE SERVICE/CURRICULUM** **INTERACTION**

There is a dynamic interaction between the service and the curriculum components in the whole-school model of guidance and counselling delivery. This is represented in the diagram by the overlap between Figure 1 and Figure 2. Members of staff involved in the delivery of the curricular aspects of guidance may, from time to time, because of the content of the curriculum being taught, find themselves in the front-line delivering **basic support** to a

student who approaches them with personal concerns due to the nature of the curriculum being delivered. For example, following an RSE module on Sexual Orientation, a student may approach the SPHE teacher with concerns about being gay. Having given the **initial basic support** to the student teachers may refer the student on to the guidance counsellor for counselling or further referral. This is illustrated in the diagram by the overlapping broken/permeable circles and the arrow (**Figure 3**) going from right to left, from the curricular into the professional area of the guidance and counselling service.

The service component may also inform the development of the curricular component. For example, if the guidance counsellor, through his/her counselling contacts with students, becomes aware of an emerging need amongst students (for example, working with students who abuse drugs, it becomes clear that essential information is not getting across to them) this trend may be fed into the review of the curriculum, and extra resources may be developed to meet this identified need.

Likewise the guidance counsellor, because of the particular content of the guidance curriculum being delivered, will/may wish to take a lead role in its delivery. For example, if there is a module on subject choice for a particular year the guidance counsellor's specialist knowledge may be especially valuable in the delivery of this aspect of the curriculum. These examples and others are represented by the arrow (**Figure 3**) going from left, the **service** area, to right into the curricular area of the guidance programme.

In this dynamic and holistic way, the curricular and the service interventions constantly inform and support each other.

FIGURE 4 **WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT** **STRUCTURES**

The top circle in the diagram (**Figure 4**) represents the **Support Structures** within the school, which offer essential support to both the service and curricular areas. This includes a central role for school management in overseeing and supporting the personnel delivering both the service and the curriculum. As the NCGE document "Planning the School Guidance Programme" states: "The Board of Management and school management team have a responsibility to ensure that the provision and practice of guidance in the school is of the highest possible standard." (NCGE, 2004, p. 20). School management supports the whole school approach to guidance by initiating the development of the school guidance plan, and by facilitating the planning team in its work, by enabling regular meetings of the key members entrusted with the responsibility to deliver both the service and the curriculum, and by providing the necessary resources to do so.

A genuine team approach in identifying student needs and an agreed response strategy to deal with them is considered to be essential good practice. Findings in "The Review of Guidance in Second Level Schools" (DES, 2006) indicated that guidance counsellors in schools with a pastoral care programme were significantly more satisfied with student support services than those in schools

without a pastoral care system. The development of such structures, where they do not currently exist, are to be encouraged as part of the school guidance planning process.

This supportive relationship is reciprocated when the guidance and counselling service consults with, offers advice to, and facilitates the work of all those involved in the Support Structures in the school

Thus, as represented by this diagram, guidance and counselling in second level schools is a professional service, which has a curricular component and which operates in a whole school framework.

FIGURE 5 **LIAISON WITH OUTSIDE** **AGENCIES**

A key component in the configuration of relationships is the dynamic interaction between the guidance and counselling service, curriculum and out of school opportunity providers and other relevant agencies. Second level guidance and counselling represents the young person's first experience of, and participation in, what will become lifelong guidance. Essential to the service and curriculum is the possibility of referral of the young person to other health care providers, and the attendance of the guidance and counselling service personnel at case conferences relevant to the young person's care or education. It also includes facilitating the young person in locating and effectively using life work information such as Open Days and seminars and in enabling them to participate actively in the experience of job finding, and experiencing real or simulated work. This interaction also

has an inwards flow when opportunity providers participate in and enhance the in-house guidance curriculum. This relationship with opportunity providers is considered crucial in enabling the young person to make a seamless transition to the next stage of their life/career choices

COMMENT ON THE NCCA DISCUSSION PAPER "A CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR GUIDANCE IN POST PRIMARY EDUCATION" (2007)

It will be clear from the policy outlined above that the final document that emerges from the consultation process initiated by the NCCA following the circulation of its Discussion Paper requires a change of title. As it relates only to the curricular elements of the guidance programme, it follows that the document title should read as follows; "*A Framework for the Curricular Elements of the Whole School Guidance Programme in Post Primary Schools*"

The Institute welcomes the detailed outline of the curriculum areas identified by the NCCA committee. This is potentially a valuable resource for the school guidance planning process.

The Discussion Paper makes no distinction between the service elements and the curricular elements of the school guidance and counselling programme. One result of this confluence is the difficulty the Discussion Paper has with the placement of counselling within the proposed framework. The framework

matrix makes just one specific reference to counselling, locating it under the heading of “Educational Guidance”, sub-headed “Challenges to Living and Learning”, and recommended for Years 1, 2 and 5. This despite the obvious need for a counselling service for 3rd Year, Transition Year and 6th Year students for personal, educational and career concerns, a position quite clearly at odds with the clear statement on p. 4 of the document that “Counselling may include personal, social and career counselling.”

The Discussion paper also states that “not all students might need individual counselling, they may on occasion require supports to address personal concerns or issues” (p. 3). This suggests further confusion by the NCCA, on the nature of counselling especially in the light of the acceptance quoted above that counselling may be for personal, educational and career issues. All students have to make life-affecting choices. No student should be asked to make such choices without the opportunity to engage in the supportive, yet challenging process of individual counselling. Personal counselling is necessary for a significant number of students at some time during their school career. According to recent Irish research, as many as one in five students at any one time may require such an intervention (Clonmel Project, Executive Report, 2006). The “Supporting Pupils” study in Scotland also found that “there will clearly always be a need for such reactive activities in response to the immediate needs of such pupils” (Scottish Government Publications, 2005, p.8). Educational and career counselling is for every student at times of critical transitions, e.g. 1st, 3rd and

Leaving Certificate years. Many guidance counsellors administer Aptitude and Interest tests to assist students in their decision-making process. Ethical considerations and good practice dictates that test results be explored with students on an individual basis in a counselling context.

The NCCA document states on p. 3 that “guidance counsellors have primary responsibility for the delivery of the school’s guidance and counselling programme.” Given that the *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, 2005) speaks of Guidance being “a whole school responsibility” then it is imperative that we differentiate between the Guidance counsellor’s **sole responsibility** which is the professional area of the guidance and counselling service, and their **shared responsibility** with other members of staff in delivering the curricular elements of the guidance programme.

It is understandable that the NCCA might see everything through a curricular lens, and might turn, habitually, all involvements with students into “curricular experiences”. However there is a need to recognise the limitations of this model when applied to service interventions that are additional to and different from “curricular experiences”. Let us explore and utilise, to the full, the richness and diversity a **service plus curriculum model** can bring to the lives of students in our schools.

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