A Case Study Analysis of a Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling in a Voluntary School in the Irish Post Primary Sector.

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A Case Study Analysis

of a Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling in a Voluntary School in the Irish Post Primary Sector

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A Case Study Analysis
of a Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling in a Voluntary School in the Irish Post Primary Sector

Case Study Report
November 2016

Research Team: Dr. Lucy Hearne, *University of Limerick*
Paul King, *Dublin City University*
Dr. Neil Kenny, *Dublin City University*
Tom Geary, *University of Limerick*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACCS	ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS
ASTI	ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY TEACHERS OF IRELAND
BOM	BOARD OF MANAGEMENT
CAMHS	CHILD AND ADULT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
CEDEFOP	EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING
CLD	CAREER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT
CMS	CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS
CPD	CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CSPE	CIVIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION
DATS	DIFFERENTIAL APTITUDE TESTS
DE	DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DEIS	DELIVERING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN SCHOOLS
DES	DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE; DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS
DLP	DESIGNATED LIAISON PERSON
ELGPN	EUROPEAN LIFELONG GUIDANCE POLICY NETWORK
ESRI	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
FET	FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
GEI	GUIDANCE ENCHANCEMENT INITATIVE
GP	GENERAL PRACTITIONER
HEI	HIGHER EDUCAITON INSTITUTE
HSE	HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE
HSLO	HOME SCHOOL LIAISON OFFICER
JCSP	JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME
IGC	INSTITUTE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS
JMB	JOINT MANAGERIAL BOARD
LCA	LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED
LCE	LEAVING CERTIFICATE ESTABLISHED
LCP	LEAVING CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME
LCVP	LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME
NAPD	NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRINCIPALS AND DEPUTY PRINCIPALS
NCCA	NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT
NCGE	NATIONAL CENTRE FOR GUIDANCE IN EDUCATION
NEPS	NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE
NICE	NETWORK FOR INNOVATION IN CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN EUROPE
NGF	NATIONAL GUIDANCE FORUM
OECD	ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
PLC	POST LEAVING CERTIFICATE
SEN	SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS
SNA	SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANT
SPHE	SOCIAL, PERSONAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION
SST	STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM
TUI	TEACHERS UNION OF IRELAND
TY	TRANSITION YEAR
TYP	TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME
WSE-MLL	WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

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Section 1
Introduction

This case report presents the findings of an Irish Research Council (IRC) funded research project carried out by the University of Limerick and Dublin City University between November 2014 and May 2016. It is an explanatory single case study that examined the phenomenon of a whole school approach to guidance counselling (personal and social, educational and career) in one Irish voluntary post primary school since the re-allocation of guidance counselling provision in Budget 2012.

The case study is set against the backdrop of national and international policy, practice and research in guidance counselling that proposes new types of delivery models and integrative approaches to meet the needs of young people and adults in an increasingly complex and uncertain world. It has also been conducted during a period of ongoing policy changes in post primary education and guidance counselling that point to a partial restoration of the guidance allocation in September 2016, and potential developments in the long-term (DES, 2016b,c).

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1.1 WHOLE SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN IRELAND

In Ireland, the provision of guidance counselling in post primary education, as articulated in the 1998 Education Act (Section 9c), requires schools to "ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices" (Government of Ireland, 1998). The paradigm shift to whole school provision in post primary education has emerged in Ireland in recent years, especially in relaton to literacy and numeracy, wellbeing and guidance counselling. Whilst a whole school approach to the delivery of guidance has been consistently endorsed in recent years (ACCS et al., 2012; DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012) there is limited evidence to support its effectiveness (Hearne et al. 2016; Hearne and Galvin, 2014). Ultimately, this approach places direct responsibility on the whole school to deliver the school guidance programme across the curriculum with the guidance counsellor leading the process (ACCS, 2012; DES, 2005a, 2012; NCGE, 2004).

The validity of the whole school approach to guidance counselling has come into much sharper focus since the re-allocation of guidance counselling in Budget 2012 where the diminution of direct guidance provision is now evident (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014, 2016; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). This decision involved the removal of the ex-quota guidance counselling allocation of hours from schools, a change that has redefined in some instances the role of the guidance counsellor within the school context (Hearne and Galvin, 2014). Prior to 2012, an ex-quota allocation was provided for guidance counselling above the standard teacher allocation to post primary schools based on the level of student enrolment in the school. However, following the 2012 re-allocation, with the exception of schools within the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) classification that retained their guidance allocation, guidance counselling provision is being resourced by school management from within the existing staffing allocation (DES, 2012). One of the effects of this policy change has seen guidance counsellors fulfilling the dual role of guidance counsellor and subject teacher thus compromising the professional boundaries of both roles. Furthermore, in some schools, non-qualified teachers, support staff and other para-professionals are fulfilling the guidance counsellor's role since 2012 (IGC, 2016). The most recent DES Circular (2016b) has proposed an additional allocation of 300 posts.

Since 2012 several national quantitative studies have been conducted to gather factual evidence on the impact of the re-allocation for guidance counsellors and the school community (ASTI, 2013, 2016; IGC, 2013, 2016; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). These studies corroborate the concerns about the quality of guidance counselling to students but have not, by their nature, captured the lived realities of guidance counselling provision within the school environment. The need for diversity in guidance counselling research including case study approaches is recognised (Bimrose and Hearne, 2012; Hearne, 2009; Hearne et al. 2016, Kidd, 2006) and supported by the literature which espouses the effectiveness of case study in educational settings (Simons, 2009; Stake, 2000, 2006). Therefore, this research project set out to examine and elucidate a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one mixed gender voluntary school through the application of an explanatory single case study method (Yin, 2014) during a challenging period in the guidance profession. For the purposes of this single case study, and in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants involved, the school will be identified as the 'case school'. In addition, the publication dates for primary resources pertaining to the case school that are used to contextualise the case study are not provided in this report.

1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CASE STUDY

The overall aim of this explanatory single case study is to critically examine a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the Irish voluntary post-primary sector in the context of a holistic model of guidance counselling (personal and social, educational and career). Whilst this study cannot generalise its findings to other post primary schools, they may be characteristic of the current situation in the sector with regard to a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Yin, 2009; 2014). The main objectives of the study were to:

1. Critically review the literature on whole school approaches to guidance counselling in the context of the Irish post-primary sector.
2. Investigate the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one voluntary school from the perspectives of six key stakeholders: school management, guidance counsellor, teaching and support staff, current students, past students and parents;
3. Design, administer and analyse the data generated from a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods;
4. Produce a case study report that explicates the findings from the single case;
5. Inform guidance counsellors and researchers on the necessary protocols involved in carrying out case study research in the guidance counselling profession.

This case report is presented in a linear-analytic structure which is applicable to explanatory case studies (Yin, 2009). Section 1 introduces the rationale for the case study including the aim and objectives. Section 2 provides contextual information on the case school. Section 3 describes the methodological framework underpinning the study, the sampling strategy in the case school, the mixed methods of data collection and analysis, and validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical issues involved in carrying out the case study in the school. Section 4 provides a comprehensive review of the literature that contextualises the case study. Section 5 presents the primary findings from the data collected in the case school. Section 6 provides a critical discussion of the synthesised findings from the case study. Finally, Section 7 evaluates and concludes the case study.

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Section 2
The Case School

The case school in this research study is a voluntary sector school established under Catholic religious patronage. Voluntary secondary schools within the Irish educational system are privately owned and managed by denominational organisations, the majority of which are under Catholic patronage. The case school, which was founded in the middle of the twentieth century and originally catered for girls only, has been a coeducational school for a number of decades. It is a DEIS school due to levels of identified educational disadvantage. As such it receives additional levels of support from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) including the ring-fencing of the guidance allocation to DEIS schools in Budget 2012.

In terms of governance, the case school has a Board of Management (BOM) with members working in collaboration with the school's senior management. The school management structure comprises of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principals (*n=6*), Posts of Responsibility (*n=9*), and a combination of Year Heads and class teachers across the six curriculum years. There is a total of 45 teaching staff within the school including one qualified Guidance Counsellor. There are a number of support staff comprising a Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO), Special Needs Assistants (SNA's), secretarial staff and other ancillary staff. The school also has a Parent's Council and a Student's Council. Five programmes are offered in the school: Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Transition Year Programme (TYP), Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). There are four class groupings per year, with the exception of TY which has one class grouping. The case school has also introduced mixed ability class groupings in recent years across first and second year groups.

There have been a number of significant changes within the school in recent times which include changes to management personnel following the appointment of a new Principal and Deputy Principal. A new Guidance Counsellor was also appointed within the last ten years. Enrolment in the school has increased significantly, roughly doubling in the last decade. The current enrolment is between 650 and 750 students. Finally, the student progression rate from Leaving Certificate to HEI's has increased considerably. Ten years ago it was under 20% and this has now grown to above 70% of students moving on to third level education.

The case school has a number of policies in place reflecting a whole school approach to guidance counselling including the School Guidance Policy, School Anti-Bullying Policy and School Special Educational Needs Policy. It has also implemented the DES Student Support Teams (SST) under the Post Primary School Initiative (2014). There are two SST meetings a week; one is for the Junior Cycle (JC) and is attended by the school management, Guidance Counsellor, JC Year Heads, Special Needs Coordinator, and School Completion Coordinator. The other is for Senior Cycle (SC) year groups and is attended by school management, Guidance Counsellor, SC Year Heads and other special post staff members who also attend the JC SST meeting.

Recently the DES conducted a *Whole School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning* (WSE-MLL) in the case school. Feedback from a specific DES Subject (Guidance) Inspection carried out within the last ten years was largely positive regarding the level of guidance counselling provision within the school. The Inspection report commended the emphasis on student care and wellbeing provided through the guidance service. There were also references made to the guidance service's effectiveness in establishing links with a number of external support agencies and organisations where both students and their families can receive support. The DES also identified some disparities in the level of guidance provision between the JC and SC groups. Provision for students in Senior Cycle was viewed as "top heavy", whereas JC students appeared to have more limited access to the guidance service.

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At the time of the DES Subject (Guidance) Inspection there was a guidance counselling allocation of 25 hours per week in the school with one full time Guidance Counsellor providing 22 hours of guidance, and a part-time Guidance Counsellor providing three hours of guidance. Following the Budget 2012 re-allocation of hours there have been slight changes to the guidance counselling allocation in the school. Currently, there is only one full time Guidance Counsellor who, due to the school's DEIS designation, has an allocation of 22 hours of guidance. With regard to the breakdown of the 22 hours allocation, 16.5 hours are given to one-to-one guidance counselling and 5.5 hours to classroom guidance. Within the 16.5 hours for one-to-one, 15 hours comprise personal guidance counselling and 1.5 hours to vocational guidance counselling.

In terms of the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling there is a very well developed initiative in the case school in the form of the 'Whole School Guidance Programme' of which the Guidance Counsellor is the Coordinator. The aim and vision of this programme is to support and develop students' self-confidence, self-awareness and future aspirations for progression to further and/ or higher education. The Whole School Guidance Programme is delivered to students from 1st year to 6th year and involves the school management, Guidance Counsellor school staff and the external community (employers, educators, parents, volunteers, past students). The programme encompasses three specific strands: *1. Mentoring*, *2. Leadership through Service*, and *3. Pathways to College*. Across these three strands a significant range of activities are provided to students. The Mentoring strand comprises of various types of student mentoring programmes from 1st year such as the Big Brother/Big Sister programme, to 6th year where students are mentored both my teachers and third level students who have progressed from the school into HEI's. The *Leadership through Service* strand comprises student activities including Friendship Week, curriculum aspects such as Civics, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and initiatives in the local community. The *Pathways to College* strand comprises a comprehensive range of activities with all year groupings including a College Awareness Week, visits to colleges by students, invited guest speakers from colleges and the employment sector, college summer schools, attendance at the annual Higher Options Fair and college Open Days, and class room and one-to-one guidance counselling by the guidance service.

As part of the Whole School Guidance Programme the case school has carried out destination tracking of its students over the last five years in order to assess student progression, aid school planning and as part of the DEIS data collection process. Students who have left school are contacted in August each year to establish their onward progression. The school has a 93% student progression rate inclusive of public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education and Training (FET) such as Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses.

The guidance service has a School Guidance Plan that guides the planning and delivery of guidance counselling to students. The Guidance Counsellor has timetabled guidance classes with four year groups: TYP, 5th Year LCA, 6th Year LCA and 6th Year LCE. The Guidance Counsellor does not have timetabled class times for 5th Year or JC class groups and intermittently borrows class periods from teaching colleagues to provide classroom guidance in 3rd year. Group guidance activities with students include interest assessments and Differential Aptitude Tests (DATS) with TY and 6th Year students.

The Guidance Counsellor is available to students across the six year groupings for one-to-one personal guidance counselling as needs arise, and is responsible for conducting one-to-one guidance sessions with 5th Year students, but due to a heavy case load it can be difficult to achieve this aspect of guidance provision at times. The procedure for appointments with the guidance service is communicated to students on signage outside the guidance office. There is also a suggestion box for students to provide feedback on the service. Students can personally approach the Guidance Counsellor for a one-to-one appointment or may be referred by another member of staff. The Guidance Counsellor has a key pastoral care role and is Chairperson of the two SST's. In addition, the Guidance Counsellor coordinates referrals for students to external service providers such as the local Health Services Executive (HSE) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Jigsaw Mental Health Services and Youthreach. The Guidance Counsellor has availed of continuing professional development (CPD) such as SafeTalk and Assist suicide prevention training, Children First child protection training and SST procedure training.

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Section 3
Methodology

This section addresses the methodology underpinning the research project including the underlying research questions, case study design frame, data collection methods, validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical issues.

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN CASE STUDY

The formulation of research questions can be a challenging aspect of research design (Bryman, 2007) but is critical to the selection of an appropriate methodology (Merriman, 2001). Indeed, a fundamental function of effective research design is to ensure that the data collected enables coherent answers to emerge for the initial questions posed (De Vaus, 2001). A number of research questions guided this case study research.

3.1.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question of this case study is: 'how is a whole school approach to guidance counselling delivered within the post-primary voluntary sector in Ireland?'

3.1.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. *How is a whole school approach to guidance counselling carried out within one voluntary school?*
2. *What is the nature of guidance counselling (personal and social, educational and career) provision within the voluntary school?*
3. *What are the perceptions of key stakeholders of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the voluntary school?*
4. *How has the DES Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling provision impacted on a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the voluntary school?*

The investigation of these research questions was addressed through a single case study design frame.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN FRAME: CASE STUDY

The research design frame is a holistic explanatory single case study (Abma and Stake, 2014; Yin, 2014). Various definitions of case study have been put forward in empirical research. Yin (2009, p.18) defines case study as an "in-depth exploration of multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project policy, institution program or system in a real-life context". Miles and Huberman (1994, p.25) define a case as, "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context". Stake (1994, p.236) suggests a "case study is defined by individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used". The strength of the case study research method is its effectiveness to unravel the complexity of one demarcated entity (Stake, 2009).

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Case study research constitutes the 'science of the singular' (Simons, 1980), which concentrates its focus on the particularities of the target case (Abma and Stake, 2014). The primary focus is to explore the characteristics and uniqueness of the particular case rather than using the case "instrumentally" to understand an issue or theory (Stake, 2000, p.3). More recently, the "particularization" of case study research aims to capture a genuine and complete understanding of the case being researched while attempting to avoid imposing reductive emic preconceptions on the emerging understanding of the case (Abma and Stake, 2014, p.1158).

Yin (2014) advises that the design and conduct of case study research needs to emphasise empirical rigour and objective quality in the collection of data. An advantage of using a case study design in this project was the close collaboration between the researchers and research participants which provided information on their perceptions and experiences (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). This stance allowed the researchers to listen to the voices of participants and gain a detailed understanding of their actions but also required the researchers to be critically reflexive throughout the research process (Crabtree and Miller, 1999; McLeod, 2014; Stake, 2005).

3.2.1 COMPONENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CASE STUDIES

Given that this research sought to investigate how a whole school approach to guidance counselling is provided within a voluntary post primary school, a case study methodology was deemed appropriate. It has helped to capture the complexity of a school setting where school culture has been shown in previous research to significantly impact on policy implementation in Irish schools (Gleeson et al., 2002). Case study research aims to understand the participant in a social context by interpreting their actions as a single group, community or a single event: *a case*. In other words, it seeks to identify what is *common* or *particular* across individuals within the case being investigated (Stake, 2005). This "multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context" is the primary defining feature of this single case study (Lewis and Ritchie, 2003 p.14). To summarise, according to Yin (2014), a case study design is particularly appropriate when:

(a) the study is designed to answer "how" and "why" questions;
(b) the researcher is unable to manipulate the behaviour of participants involved in the study;
(c) the contextual conditions of the case are considered relevant to the phenomenon under study; or
(d) there are unclear boundaries between the phenomenon and context.

Five key features have been suggested to characterise naturalistic case study research and contribute toward its effectiveness in exploring "…with minimum intervention the particularity of a case in its ordinary situation from multiple perspectives" (Abma and Stake, 2014 p. 1150). They are *emic issues*, *influence of context*, *meaning and interpretation*, *holistic understanding* and *learning from the case* (Abma and Stake, 2014). Firstly, Stake (1995; 2000; 2004; 2009) emphasises the importance of the researcher being receptive to unforeseen emic issues emerging over the course of the case study data collection. While there may be an initial focus and research question(s) that serve as an opening guide for the case study research, the design of the research should not be viewed as preordained (Abma and Stake,

2014). From this perspective the issues that formed the original research questions and are used to organise the case may not eventually be the issues that are used to draw up and organise the case report (Abma and Stake, 2014). In contrast, Yin (2014) emphasises the importance of using *etic issues* that researchers bring to the case study to organise the research and suggests that researchers should be guided in the data collection and interpretation by these research question in a structured manner.

Secondly, the complexity and nuances of the particular case need to be understood as being situational and highly *influenced by context* (Abma and Stake, 2014; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The case should not be viewed as an isolated or discrete entity that is beyond the influence of the wider context in which it sits. The case exists and is influenced by the external context which comprises "the physical, social, historical, sometimes political, ethical, and aesthetic contexts" (Abma and Stake, 2014, p.1151).

Thirdly, the aim of case study research is to generate *meaning and understanding* rather than uncover underlying universal laws or truths (Schwandt, 2001; Stake, 2006). The researcher is attempting to generate an understanding of the "interactively constructed meanings endowed to the world" (Abma and Stake, 2014, p. 1152) and shared by those within the case. This design is dialogical in that the research seeks to engage in dialogue with those within the case rather than focus entirely on unveiling a universal objective reality or an exposition of the subjective interpretations of those within the case (Abma and Stake, 2014).

Fourthly, the case should be conceived as a multi-layered contextually sensitive ecology that needs to be organically explored rather than reduced to cause and effect relations (Stake, 2006). In order to generate a *holistic understanding* of the case the researcher includes a variety of perspectives in the collection of data in order to reflect the diversity of meanings emanating from the different biographies in the case (Abma and Stake, 2014).

Finally, one of the principle selection criterion in choosing a case is the potential *learning* from the particular case which is both time and context bound and not depending on its being representative of a wider truth (Abma and Stake, 2014; Stake, 2005). The use of thick description reveals more of the detailed complexity inherent in the particular case and this can sometimes lead to the improvement of generalisations. This is particularly true when the detailed information that emerges regarding the case is rooted in a situation of stress (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

3.2.2   EXPLANATORY SINGLE CASE STUDY

This case study utilised an explanatory single case study design to explain the current reality of the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within a voluntary school following the 2012 Budget re-allocation. As such, it aimed to "capture the specificity of a particular situation" within the case school (Cohen et al., 2011, p.382). The aim of this case study was not to achieve typicality for the case under investigation, nor generalisability to other cases. The design involved a detailed description of the context, boundedness and data collection using multiple sources. It has drawn on Stakes' (1995) intrinsic model of case study to uncover "rich intrinsic pictures and different insights" from various angles (Thomas, 2011, p.21).

An explanatory framework was used to ascertain and explain how a whole school approach to guidance counselling is experienced by a range of different stakeholders in the case school during a specific period in 2015-2016 in the broader context of the Irish post primary sector. Yin (2014) differentiates between *exploratory*, *descriptive*, and *explanatory* case studies. An *exploratory case study* is mainly used for theory building and explores those situations in which the phenomenon or intervention being studied has no clear, single set of outcomes. They may be undertaken prior to the definition of the research questions and hypotheses. A *descriptive case study* tries to completely describe different characteristics of a phenomenon in its context and so is also mainly used for theory building. In contrast, an *explanatory case study* investigates causal relationships and presents data to explain how events occur or are experienced by participants. They are characterised by 'how' and 'why' research questions to investigate the relationships proposed between different theory components or aspects of the case context (Yin, 2014).

3.2.3   BOUNDARIES OF THE SINGLE CASE STUDY

Merriam (2001, p.27) contends that "the single most defining feature of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study". With regards to this single case study the bounded system means "the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (Creswell, 2005, p.439). This allows for a deeper exploration of the phenomenon and the emergence of rich data about the case environment (Creswell, 2009). The *context* of this case study is the broader post primary sector in Ireland. The *case* is the phenomenon under investigation, i.e. a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the post primary voluntary sector. The *unit of analysis* is one Irish voluntary school *(See Fig.3.1)*.
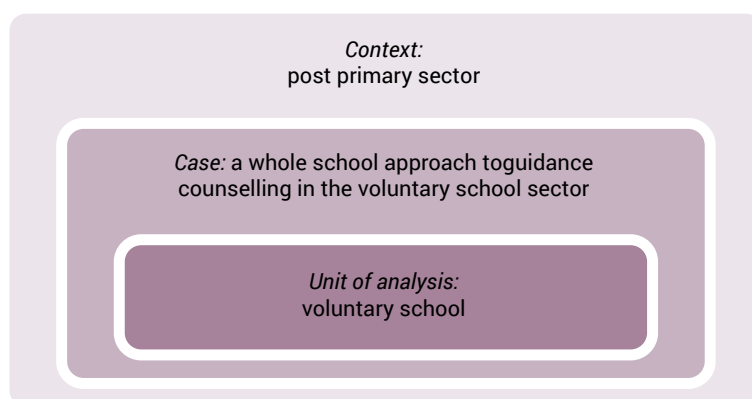
Fig 3.1: *explanatory single case study (adapted from Yin, 2014)*

Context:
post primary sector

Case: a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the voluntary school sector

Unit of analysis:
voluntary school

Unlike many other forms of research, the case study design does not favour any particular methods of data collection or data analysis and a range were utilised in this study for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2014). Within the unit of analysis six stakeholders participated in the study: school management, Guidance Counsellor, teaching and support staff, current and past students and parents of current students.

3.2.4 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF CASE STUDY RESEARCH

The use of a holistic single case analysis has increased within educational research as it can contextualise the subjective experiences of those involved in the case and explain what is happening on the ground (Hearne, 2009; Yin, 2014). Case study design can be adopted at various points in a programme of research, for example, at a pilot phase researchers tend to use it as a way to develop ideas or refine existing theories prior to a more extensive research (Hearne, 2009; Hearne et al., 2016). A particular strength of the case study methodology is its flexibility as it allows for a broad range of research methods to be utilised (Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, case study can explain the causal links in real-life interventions such as guidance counselling (DePoy and Gilson, 2008).

Intrinsically, this case study research set out to develop an understanding of the case context that goes beyond representing the subjective understandings of participants and offers a means of investigating a complex social unit which consists of multiple variables or stakeholders (Abma and Stake, 2014; Bassey, 1999). This was particularly useful in the school setting which comprises a complex web of school management and staff, students, parents and external interests such as the DES. Another key benefit of this case study research has been its ability to capture holistically the 'lived reality' of those operating within the case phenomenon (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Although case study is a distinctive form of empirical inquiry (Cohen et al, 2011; Stake, 2004; Yin, 2014), there can be concerns regarding observer bias or subjective judgements (Cohen et al. 2011; Yin, 2014). Another issue is the selection of single cases that are representative or typical of the larger cohort, thus increasing transferability across cases. Yin (2003) counters this by highlighting that it is important to be clear that the purpose of the case study is to expand and generate theory or 'analytical generalisation' as opposed to proving theory or 'statistical generalisation'. Through a deep and thorough exploration of the particular aspects of a case the researcher can identify general and universal patterns that have relevance in settings other than the particular case (Abma and Stake, 2014; Yin, 2014). From this perspective, case study research constitutes "the science of the singular" (Simons, 1980, p.1). If a collective model of case studies is used then the scope for generalisation increases (Yin, 2014).

The use of multiple sources of evidence in this single case study such as pattern matching, explanation building, addressing of rival explanations, use of member reflections, peer support and confirmation and development of a comprehensive audit trail addressed validity and reliability issues (Yin, 2009; 2014). Two types of triangulation, data and methodological, were also used in the study to establish and verify interpretations of meaning emerging in the case study (Bryman, 2012). In terms of quality assurance, triangulation ensured that the case study was based on a disciplined approach and not simply a matter of intuition, good intention and common sense (Stake, 2005).

3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES: MIXED METHODS

A mixed method approach for the collection of the primary data through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used as it is particularly appropriate in vocational guidance research (Perry, 2009). Using mixed methods supported the bringing together of context, meaning-making, and community processes in the study (Perry, 2009). It provided both breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration, while offsetting the weaknesses inherent in using each approach by itself (Yin, 2014). It also maximised the empirical power and effectiveness of the case study (Yin, 2014).

3.3.1 ACCESS AND SAMPLING OF PARTICIPANTS

One post-primary school which met four specific inclusion criteria took part in this single case study:

i. a voluntary school;
ii. mixed gender enrolment;
iii. enrolment of 500+ students;
iv. a fulltime qualified guidance counsellor employed on staff.

Following institutional ethical approval from the University of Limerick in Spring 2015 the research team invited 29 voluntary sector schools from across different geographical regions that met the inclusion criteria to participate in the research. Written information was simultaneously sent to school principals and guidance counsellors requesting voluntary participation in the study. In May 2015 one voluntary school agreed to take part following a meeting between the research team and the school team (Principal, Deputy Principal and Guidance Counsellor) to discuss the research study, mutual expectations and concerns, and the process of data collection and dissemination of findings. Written consent was provided by the Principal to undertake the study in the case school and the arrangements for access and fieldwork were negotiated with the school team. According to pre-agreed procedures with the Principal the research team collaborated with nominated members of the school staff and Parents Council to collect the data.

3.3.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The fieldwork comprised of three stages (Patton, 2002) and took place between the 25th May, 2015 and March 7th, 2016. A description of the fieldwork timeline from entering the field to the completion of primary data collection is outlined in *Fig. 3.2*.

Stage 1	Entering the Field	*24 May 2015* Initial meeting between research team and school management in case school
Stage 2	In the Field	*2 & 9 June 2015* Interviews with guidance counsellor and school management
		5 Oct 2015 - 16 Nov 2015 Administration of online staff survey
		5 Oct 2015 - 16 Nov 2015 Four naturalistic observations of guidance counselling activities
		22 Oct 2015 Student focus group: Junior Cycle
		3 Nov 2015 Student focus group: Senior Cycle
		9 Feb 2016 Focus group with parents
		22 Jan 2016 - 6 Mar 2016 Interviews with past students
Stage 3	Close of Framework	*7 Mar 2016 onwards* Exit field, data analysis, and interpretation of findings

Fig 3.2: Timeline for primary data collection fieldwork (adapted from Patton, 2002)

The gathering of data involved four data sources and seven recursive phases of data collection in the case school between 2nd June 2015 and 6th March 2016:

1. Semi-structured interviews with the Principal and Deputy Principal, the Guidance Counsellor and four past students of the school;
2. Focus groups with a sample of both JC and SC students, and parents of students currently enrolled in the school;
3. Administration of an on-line survey to all teaching and support staff;
4. Naturalistic observations of four guidance counselling activities in the school.

In addition, an examination of primary data sources was carried out on a range of documents relevant to a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. Although the research team were not present for the events or situations described in the secondary data sources, the documents were helpful for an objective examination of communication processes, strategic planning and appraisal of guidance provision within the case school (Bryman and Bell, 2003; Merriam, 2001).

The nine documents reviewed were:
1. School Plan
2. School Guidance Policy
3. School Guidance Plan
4. Whole School Guidance Programme
5. School Anti-bullying Policy
6. School Special Needs Policy
7. School Handbook
8. DES WSE-MLL School Report
9. DES Subject (Guidance) Inspection Report

3.3.3. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured qualitative interviews are one of the most important forms of data collection within a case study methodology as they are a "guided conversation rather than structured queries" (Yin, 2009, p.89) and an "interchange of views" (Kvale, 1996, p.409). In this case study semi structured interviews using individual interview frameworks offered enough flexibility to respond to what the interviewee said while also maintaining systematic direction in the interview process (Cohen et al., 2011). The frameworks included a sufficient number of open ended questions to allow the interviewees represent their own experiences, feelings and opinions (Merriam, 2009). However, interviews may be subject to biases from the human interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee which was an important consideration in this case study (Cohen et al., 2011; Kvale, 1996).

3.3.3.1 INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR

Individual audio-taped face-to-face interviews were conducted with the school management (Principal and Deputy Principal) and the Guidance Counsellor. They were provided with a detailed research Information Letter and Consent Form in advance of the interviews. The semi-structured interviews were approximately one hour and were conducted in the case school. As research interviews require ethical sensitivity (Cohen et al., 2011) the interviewer made participants aware of the confidential and voluntary nature of their engagement in the interview process.

3.3.3.2 INTERVIEWS WITH PAST STUDENTS

Individual audio-taped interviews were conducted with four past students of the case school. A total of 11 past students were contacted by email requesting participation in the research study through an Information Letter and Consent Form. With regard to the Skype interviews, the ethical issues were considered the same as the face-to-face interviews. As this group were quite dispersed the four past students who volunteered were interviewed via telephone (*n=1*) and Skype (*n=3*). Telephone or Skype technology has a number of advantages in research including cost and geographical flexibility (Kazmer and Xie, 2008). Skype is user-friendly, easy to install and use and has an instant messaging function which is a convenient tool for managing data collection problems and sharing information amongst participants (Booth, 2008). Skype has also been suggested to have the advantage of ease of audio-recording which offers researchers the opportunity to record computer-to-computer and computer-to-telephone conversations (Kazmer and Xie, 2008).

However, there are also challenges associated with using Skype for research interviews, such as occasional time lags in the conversation, which can break the flow of an interview (Booth, 2008). There may also be difficulty for both the interviewer and interviewee in readily seeing nonverbal cues, especially in audio-only mode. In addition, with some participants in particular, ethical and technical issues may need to be managed to ensure that individuals' rights are respected and that everyone feels comfortable participating in the research (Booth, 2008).

3.3.4 FOCUS GROUPS

In this case study, the focus group method allowed current students and parents to open up and the facilitator to probe deeper to produce results that have high face validity (Krueger and Casey, 2014). Krueger and Casey (2014, p.6) define a focus group as "a carefully planned discussion, designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment". Although this method is used to reflect the views of individual group members, it recognises that attitudes and perceptions do not develop in isolation (Morse and Field, 1996). Whilst the participants in the different focus groups could hear each other's responses and contributions, they did not have to agree with each other's comments on a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Patton, 2002).

This method did create an environment where disclosures were nurtured and encouraged on the topic of participants' experiences of whole school guidance provision in the case school. With regard to the two student focus groups, the facilitator ensured that the students understood that their disclosures were shared with each other and not just the research team and that intense group discussion may give rise to feelings of stress or distress (Goodman and Evans, 2006; Hennessy and Heary, 2005; Smith, 1995).

3.3.4.1 FOCUS GROUPS WITH JUNIOR AND SENIOR CYCLE STUDENTS

Two audio-taped focus groups were carried out in the case school with students currently enrolled at the school during normal school hours. There were a number of important considerations in the design of the two focus groups: they were limited to a maximum of ten participants (Horner, 2000; Maughan, 2003); there was a minimal age disparity between the participants (Kennedy et al., 2001); and both genders were included as they are equally effective in collecting qualitative data as single gender focus groups (Hill, 2005).

The focus group with the JC students (*n=10)* was 42 minutes in duration, and the focus group with the SC students (*n=10*) was 49 minutes in duration. In consideration of Child Protection issues, two members of the research team conducted both focus groups, one was the facilitator and the other was the observer and audio recorder. The JC group comprised students from 3rd year only, six male and four female. The SC group comprised students from 6th year only, seven male and three female.

Following written consent from the school Principal the research team requested participation from students through appropriate ethical procedures. Students under the age of 18 were provided with an Information Letter and Consent Form for their parents/guardians to consent to their child's participation. Additionally, these students provided their own written consent to take part prior to the day of the focus group meeting. Similarly, students over the age of 18 were also provided with an Information Letter and

Consent Form to take part in the focus group prior to it taking place. As the number of volunteering students exceeded the designated number for each focus group (*n=10*) (Horner, 2000; Maughan, 2003), random selection was used through www.Randomizer.org. to select the participants in each focus group. Two separate semi-structured thematic frameworks were used to guide the two focus groups. The facilitator's role was to maintain a balance between focusing the conversation on specific topics and being flexible to explore unanticipated issues that arose through probing for levels of understanding and meaning (Krueger and Casey, 2014).

3.3.4.2 FOCUS GROUP WITH PARENTS

One audio-taped focus group was carried out with a sample of parents of the school's Parents Council (*n=7* of a total population of *n=15*) whose children are currently enrolled in the case school. The focus group comprised of six females and one male who had been supplied with research Information Letters and Consent Forms to participate in the research. As they were adult participants' only one member of the research team facilitated the focus group. It was audio-recorded and approximately 60 minutes in duration. Again, the design allowed for a carefully planned discussion to develop in an environment that is perceived as safe and non-threatening to participants (Krueger and Casey, 2014). The focus group was facilitated in a non-directive and unbiased way using a thematic interview framework with guiding questions to generate data (Krueger and Casey, 2014).

3.3.5 ONLINE SURVEY WITH TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF

The quantitative element of this study involved the design and administration of an online survey through the SurveyMonkey platform (Symonds, 2011) to the total population of teaching and support staff within the case school (*n=61*). Its delivery was preceded by a research information descriptor email outlining the study and requesting participation from teachers and support staff. The use of internet based survey platforms has advanced dramatically in recent years. Internet surveys are user-friendly for respondents and have an added visual attraction (Cohen et al., 2011). However, there are a number of limitations to the application of SurveyMonkey which include the time commitment involved for participants, their computer proficiency and the allied difficulty of participants being able to return unfinished surveys (Symonds, 2011).

The staff survey contained a combination of closed and open questions to provide quantitative and qualitative data. The questions addressed specific thematic areas relevant to the research questions. The use of Likert scales and rating scales (Bell, 2005) in the closed questions elicited statistics on a whole school approach to guidance counselling, professional roles, activities, interventions and the impact of the 2012 Budget re-allocation. The open questions captured "the specificity of a particular situation" within the case school (Cohen et al., 2011, p.382).

3.3.6 NATURALISTIC OBSERVATIONS OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING ACTIVITIES

Four naturalistic observations were also carried out on elements of guidance counselling provision within the case school by the field researcher. The different observations were related to the research questions and used as a means to "collect data to complement or set in perspective data obtained by other means" in the case study (Robson, 2002, p.312). The use of naturalistic observations as an approach to data collection supported validity and addressed issues of bias that might have emerged in the case study (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014). The advantage of observation as a method of data collection was that it provided access to the "real life" of the case school (Robson, 2002, p. 310). However, such methods can cause participants to change their behaviour when they know that they are being observed. There may also be incidents of selective bias on the part of the observer, judgemental validity of evidence, selective memory and selective data entry (Robson, 2002).

The selection of the specific guidance activities was negotiated with school management, the Guidance Counsellor and relevant staff. Consent forms were signed by the school Principal and Guidance Counsellor in advance of the observations. Semi-structured field-notes recorded the observed activities through the use of a data collection template. The observations involved two guidance classes and two SST meetings. The classes were delivered to a 6th Year LCA group and a TY group. The classroom content included group discussion, active learning exercises and online career exploration. The observations of the SST meetings, which were chaired by the Guidance Counsellor, provided insights on how a range of school staff work collaboratively to address the personal, social and educational and vocational needs of students in terms of pastoral care, support and guidance through a whole school approach.

3.4 VALIDITY, RELIABILITY, REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICS IN THE CASE STUDY

In this explanatory single case study, the specific threats to validity were reactivity, respondent bias and researcher bias (Robson, 2002, p.174). *Reactivity* describes the impact of the researcher's presence on the way participants behave or react while being observed or interviewed during research. *Respondent bias* can come in the form of obstructiveness or withholding information to the researcher or, conversely, in phenomena such as 'good bunny syndrome' whereby the participant is motivated to give the researcher the desired answers. *Researcher bias* refers to the impact of the researcher's personal views, assumptions or preconceptions on the data collection and analysis process (Robson, 2002).

The four criteria of *construct validity*, i*nternal validity*, *external validity* and *reliability* were applied to establish the quality of the case study (Abma and Stake, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011; Yin, 2014). Specifically, *construct validity* is defined as the procedures used to establish correct operational measures for the concepts being studied (Yin, 2014). *Internal validity* refers to the internal logic and consistency of the research (Punch, 2005), and reflects how closely the findings represent and faithfully reflect what was studied in this case study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). With regards to *external validity* (or generalisability) the use of a holistic and in-depth method to investigate the phenomenon means that the findings of this single

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case study may be transferable to other post-primary schools in the voluntary sector (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, it was more important to elucidate school dynamics and relationships than to describe the symptoms and frequency of issues that emerged (Flyberg, 2001). Finally, *reliability* refers to the extent to which the findings of this case study can be replicated with similar subjects in a similar context, as well as the importance of accounting for the changing contexts and circumstances that are fundamental to the consistency of the research outcome (Merriam, 2001).

A number of approaches were used to support robust rigour and validity in this single case study, namely; regular peer debriefing and support amongst the research team, respondent validity, a detailed audit trail and prolonged involvement with the case school (McLeod, 2014). Respondent validity with the entire interview participants' was used to enhance qualitative credibility. They were forwarded their interview transcripts to check for accuracy, and monitor any potential researcher bias (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). The school management and Guidance Counsellor had the opportunity to review draft versions of the case report before final publication (Tracey, 2010). A detailed audit trail was maintained throughout the research project through the use of a field research diary and a project Google Drive platform. Finally, prolonged engagement in the case school by the researcher lasted approximately nine and a half months during the data collection phase.

Data triangulation was also used to ensure rigour and validity in this single case study. The multiple data sources addressed different but complementary questions and provided a more holistic picture of the phenomena of interest and deeper insights into the relationships within it (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Tracey, 2010; Yin, 2003). It also provided a "'fuller' picture of the social phenomenon under study" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003, p.462). However, data triangulation also has the propensity to open up the possibilities of differing accounts or versions of events (Robson, 2002).

Professional reflexivity by the research team was a central aspect of this case study. Reflexivity refers to the process of self-examination of the parameters of one's professional role and its implications for ethical practice (Havercamp, 2005). For the research team it involved an individual and group awareness of their own biases, beliefs and values and their potential influence on behaviours or interactions with participants during the conduct of the case study (Etherington, 2004). The team designed the study and instruments, problematised issues, regularly monitored for any incidents of researcher bias, analysed the emerging data at different time points and took part in group interpretation of the findings (McLeod, 2014).

Ethical research practice in this case study was guided by a set of principles and codes of practice that served to inform decisions and courses of actions across the situations arising in the research context (Robson, 2002; Thomas, 2009). Due to the personal aspect of much of guidance counselling practice, the ethical issues that arise in guidance research are often the same as those that occur in the context of guidance counselling practice (Cohen et al., 2011; Hearne, 2009; McLeod, 2014). Nonetheless case study research involves "a higher degree of moral risk than other methodologies" (McLeod, 2010, p.54) as it raises the dilemma of identifying the participants and the institutions involved.

Three different levels of ethical regulation; *legislative*, *professional* and *personal* were adhered to in this case study (Cohen et al., 2011). Firstly, ethical approval was received from the University of Limerick's Faculty of Education and Health Science Ethics Committee for the study. Secondly, professional codes of conduct, including the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC, 2012) *Code of Ethics* and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE, 2008) *Research Code of Ethics* were adhered to in the case study design. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011) *Children First* guidelines were referred to in relation to doing research with students under 18 in the focus groups. Finally, the personal regulatory aspect involved reflexivity and discretionary decision-making and the creation of a "moral space in which effective inquiry can take place, in which all participants feel safe enough to make the maximum contribution to knowledge and understanding" (McLeod, 2010, p.55).

Finally, as the research team were guests in the 'private space' of the case school (Stake, 2005) three key principles guided ethical conduct in the case school: duty of care toward participants, participant informed consent and protection of participants' confidentiality (Hearne, 2013). All participants were fully informed about the aims and voluntary nature of the research study through research Information Letters and Consent Forms. In the case of students under 18, parental/guardian consent was also sought. The researcher also liaised with the Designated Liaison Person (DLP) in the case school in advance of initiating the research so that an agreed response protocol was in place should any student welfare concerns arise during the course of the fieldwork.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This section concludes the description of the methodology and methods of the research study. Section 4 will provide a critical review of the literature related to the case study.

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Section 4
Literature Review

This literature review establishes the theoretical framework in undertaking this explanatory single case study (Yin, 2009, 2014). The review provides the broader context in relation to the phenomenon of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one Irish voluntary school since the re-allocation of guidance counselling provision in Budget 2012. The review is divided into two thematic sections. Firstly, the review scrutinises the nature and position of guidance counselling in international and national guidance policy. Secondly, it examines a whole school approach to guidance counselling in post primary education with a particular emphasis on the role and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved.

In Europe, guidance counselling and the nature of its provision varies from country to country with the emphasis either on career or a more social and personal model of guidance counselling (OECD, 1991; Volmari et al., 2009). Since its inception in 1966, post-primary guidance counselling in Ireland has evolved in response to a number of educational, societal and economic changes. In Ireland, the notion of a holistic and integrated approach to guidance counselling provision has been promoted for the last four decades and is reflected in the 1992 *Green Paper on Education* (DE, 1992). This holistic approach incorporates *personal and social, educational* and *career guidance* (Hearne and Gavin, 2014; NCGE, 2004; Seed, 1992), while the integrated approach advocates the involvement of the whole school community in guidance provision (DES, 2005a, 2012; IGC 2008). The guidance counsellor in the Irish education system may also have a dual role comprising both guidance counselling and subject specialist classroom teaching (Hayes and Morgan, 2011).

Arising from Budget 2012 the DES proposes that schools have greater autonomy on how best to prioritise their available resources to meet their statutory obligations in relation to guidance provision arising from the Education Act (1998) (DES, 2012). In the present context of the reduction in the overall pupil teacher ratio the allocation of guidance resources has become decentralised to school management and is dependent on the value, or otherwise, that management places on the provision of guidance in schools. It is notable, however, that there was a re-emphasis of the use of a whole school approach to guidance counselling by the DES following the Budget 2012 re-allocation (DES, 2012). Recent research exploring the impact of the 2012 re-allocation of guidance hours has suggested a clear diminution in the provision of guidance counselling services in the post-primary sector (IGC, 2016). The overall pattern emerging from a range of research findings suggests an ad-hoc and disjointed response from schools in meeting their statutory requirement to provide an appropriate and comprehensive guidance counselling service to post primary students (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2016; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013; TUI, 2014).

4.1 GUIDANCE COUNSELLING POLICY: INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Guidance and careers education exists at the interface between the individual and society and plays an important role in how opportunities are allocated and by whom within society (Watts, 1997). Psychological theories of human and career development have dominated guidance perspectives in many countries leading to a neglect of the socio-political nature or impact of guidance policy and interventions (Kidd, 2006; Savickas, 2000; Watts, 1997). It is claimed that guidance counselling has the potential to play a significant role in both public and private goals (OECD, 2004; Sultana, 2003, 2004, 2008; Sultana and Watts, 2006a,b) and supports, for example, increased prosperity and sustainable employment for clients (Sultana, 2014). The justification for carrying out this particular case study arose from the context of a Government budget decision in 2012 to change the nature of the guidance allocation in post primary education (DES, 2012). This decision might be viewed a cost saving measure by the Irish Government during a period of particular economic difficulty. However, the Gatsby Report published in the UK in 2014 which sought to identify what good career guidance might look like, calculated that to implement the Report's eight benchmarks for good career guidance would cost less than 1% of a school's budget (Gatsby Foundation, 2014).

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Other international perspectives suggest that guidance counselling can reduce the economic and social costs associated with industrial relations disputes, strikes and social unrest, such as lost wages or lost taxes (Herr, 2008). Guidance counselling, vocational education policy and practice discourses are claiming a "lineage from modernity... where individuals are encouraged to carve out dignified and fulfilling lives for themselves, irrespective of social origin, gender, ethnicity and other...factors" (Sultana, 2014, p.7). The reality, however, is that the ideological and socio-political dimensions underpinning guidance counselling has been contested leading to the emergence of a variety of approaches to guidance and careers education (Sultana, 2014).

Historically, different disciplines including psychology, education, sociology and labour market economics have informed the main theoretical perspectives in guidance counselling. For example, psychological perspectives are informed by values of individualism, autonomy and the centrality of work in people's lives that align that drawn heavily from psychological trait theories and assessment (Kidd, 2006). However, such perspectives have been questioned by sociological theorists or those who propose a more integrated model that takes account of both the psychological and sociological elements of guidance counselling (Kidd, 2006). More recently, constructivist approaches (e.g. the narrative paradigm) emphasise an active role for clients as agents in the ongoing management of their careers and their own lives (Reid, 2016; Savickas 2011; Savickas et al., 2009; Watts, 1997).

4.1.1   IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

According to Watts (1997) the four main overarching ideological positions underpinning guidance provision are: liberal, conservative, progressive, and radical (see Table 4.1).

Four socio-political approaches to career guidance		
	Core focus on Society	*Core focus on Individual*
Change	Radical	Progressive
Status Quo	Conservative	Liberal

Table 4.1: *Four socio-political approaches (adapted from Watts, 1997)*

Much of the literature discusses guidance from a *liberal* perspective viewing it as a non-directive process (Watts, 1997). This ideological position is heavily influenced by humanistic psychology in general and in particular the work of Carl Rogers (1961). The whole school model of guidance counselling currently promoted by the DES aligns closely with the humanistic approach to guidance developed in the American school system. The progression of comprehensive school guidance programmes in the US has been influenced heavily by findings from an OECD (2004) report which advocated strongly for increased aid around personal interviews for students. However, Gysbers and Henderson (2014) argue that it is important to gain the support of policies at a local, state and national level, have trained staff and sufficient resources to provide such programmes. The humanistic emphasis in whole school guidance counselling in Ireland also has parallels with the eastern collectivist perspective in Hong Kong where a whole school approach to guidance has been established in the form of a comprehensive developmental and preventive guidance programme since the mid-1990's (Hui, 2002). Guidance in Hong Kong refers to a school's pastoral system, programmes and activities that assist students to develop as a whole-person through the development of self-knowledge, self-esteem and in the formation of their character (Hui, 2002). The terms 'guidance' and 'counselling' are explicitly separate notions suggesting an explicit segregation of aspects of the overall programme. Remedial guidance addresses students' personal, social and learning needs while preventive guidance aims to teach students coping skills as a pre-emptive measure for any potential crises that students might encounter. By comparison, counselling aims to assist students in coping with anxiety and turbulence. However, even though the whole school approach to guidance was originally defined as the involvement of all teachers in recognising and aiding students with difficulties, the concept of a whole school approach in policy documents was not well defined and leant more towards remedial guidance (Hui, 2002).

Nevertheless, the *liberal* approach has been criticised by theorists who view guidance from a sociological perspective and see the practice of careers education as a *conservative* force engaged in the wielding of social control (Roberts, 1977). Others argue that guidance counselling practice which focuses solely on the technicist aspects of the client-counsellor interactions limits the entire profession's impact at the "micro- and meso- levels" (Sultana, 2014, p.9). A critical discourse has emerged in recent times that argues for a more sociological focus in guidance with a particular emphasis on its role in supporting a social justice agenda (Blustein, 2011; Irving and Malik, 2005; Blustein, 2011; Sultana, 2014). From this perspective, guidance needs to be careful not to collude with social control tendencies which privilege the interests of powerful and influential groups within society (Colley, 2000; Hyslop-Margison and Ayaz Naseem, 2007; Irving and Malik, 2005).

In response to the *conservative* position's critique of the *liberal* perspective on guidance, the *progressive* perspective views guidance as a "means for individual change" (Watts, 1997, p.353). This perspective adopts a proactive approach that seeks to address the aspirations of individuals across social classes with particular emphasis on motivating those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Watts and Kidd, 2000; Watts 1997). The role of the guidance counsellor here is to encourage individuals in their 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2004) regarding their career or life's possibilities (Sultana, 2014). Hence, guidance counselling is viewed as a process to encourage an experience of both freedom and security in individuals (Bauman, 2006) and to move clients beyond their 'bounded rationality' (Simon, 1991) inherited from social, class or life's circumstances (Sultana, 2014). In this perspective, guidance counselling is the process of supporting the person to transcend the dictates of choices founded in 'realism' or 'realistic choices' (Colley, 2000) through supporting empowerment and aspiration (Sultana, 2014).

The *progressive* stance also emphasises the advocacy role of guidance to remove external barriers for individuals' social and/or career advancement. However, this stance has been criticised for suggesting that individual factors are at the root of the problem of advancement amongst those from underprivileged backgrounds while ignoring group and social hierarchies (Watts, 1997). In contrast, a more *radical* position that promotes social change is premised on the assumption that the advancement of certain groups within society requires change to the hierarchical system itself rather than focusing on individual characteristics (Ranson and Rippons, 1988). This *radical* approach has also been criticised for its adherence to measuring successful guidance provision through the provision of equality to clients, irrespective of their needs or abilities (Sultana, 2014).

4.1.2   INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN POLICY

In recent years a series of international reports conducted by influential international organisations such as the European Union (Sultana, 2003, 2004, 2008; Sultana and Watts, 2006a,b) and the World Bank (Watts and Fretwell, 2004) have had a significant impact on guidance policy and practice. The OECD has also been a major player in guidance policy formation in the last two decades. According to the OECD (2004) government mechanisms for funding career guidance influences the nature and quality of services. Overall, international views on guidance counselling tend to favour the career guidance aspects of the role in preference to the counselling dimension (Council of the European Union, 2008; ELGPN, 2014: OECD, 2002; Volmari et al., 2009). This closely aligns with the human capital development perspective of the OECD in relation to education 'reform' during the latter half of the twentieth century and *liberal* ideological perspectives on guidance provision (Watts, 1997). This focus emphasises the need for guidance counselling professionals and guidance policy initiatives to be flexible and adaptive to the changing economic, social and globalised reality of the work environment (Volmari et al., 2009). Within this developing careers reality, the individual must be flexible and work resilient but also have an appreciation of the role of lifelong learning in career progression (ELGPN, 2012).

In the early part of the twenty-first century the OECD recognised the changing aims and working environment for career guidance and career education across the EU (OECD, 2004). It also recommended policies influenced by *progressive* perspectives for guidance in schools which shifts the focus solely from imminent educational and occupational choices as an emphasis in national guidelines on guidance provision (OECD, 2001). According to the OECD (2001, p.8), this requires an approach that is "embedded in the curriculum, and which incorporates learning from experience". It has been argued that a whole school approach for guidance counselling provision would be an effective organisational and practitioner model for meeting these objectives (OECD, 2004). This perspective encourages a wider concept of guidance counselling inclusive of personal self-management skills development, effective decision making and implementation of those career-related decisions for pupils (OECD, 2004).

Guidance counselling is a multidimensional role interlinked with education, labour market and society (Cort, Härkönen and Volmari, 2004). The developing importance of networking skills and the ability to interact effectively with others in the work environment has led to an increasing emphasis on the social and interpersonal skills to work effectively within communities, organisations and networks (Volmari et al., 2009). A similar picture of complexity has emerged in the working environment for career guidance professionals across the European Union (NICE, 2012; Volmari et al., 2009) where changes to policy, budgets and social factors have impacted on the role and competencies of practitioners as illustrated in the model in *Fig. 4.1*.

Fig. 4.1: Roles and competencies inherent in contemporary working contexts for guidance counsellors (Source: NICE 2012, p. 44)

A significant shift in European guidance policy was reflected in the Council of the European Union's (2008) adoption of the *Council's Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies.* This is one of the key policy documents relating to lifelong guidance and identifies four priority areas: encouraging the lifelong acquisition of career management skills; facilitating access by all citizens to guidance services; developing quality assurance in guidance; and encouraging coordination and cooperation among national, regional and local stakeholders in guidance. More recent publications, for example, Volmari et al. (2009) and the Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE, 2012) adopt a broad view of guidance counselling provision across the EU regarding the development of self-management and decision making competencies among post-primary level students. Policy direction at European level is summarised in the 2014 European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) Evidence Guide. The Guide presents the existing international research base on the impact of lifelong guidance, including its educational outcomes, economic and employment outcomes, and social outcomes. It builds on the work undertaken by the ELGPN during 2008–2014 and suggests that guidance is most effective when it is conceived as a lifelong system and that policy-makers should continue to develop this evidence base to ensure that policies are based on the best evidence available (Hooley, 2014). In addition, a number of country-led blueprints and frameworks have emerged in recent years in Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America, which appear to give credence to the requirement of specific methods to help develop career management skills (CMS) in citizens. In Europe, Scotland has become one of the most recent countries to produce a framework targeted at the primary and post-primary sector (Education Scotland, Skills Development Scotland and Smarter Scotland, 2015).

4.1.3   NATIONAL POLICY: GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN THE IRISH POST-PRIMARY SYSTEM 1966-2016

Guidance counselling was first introduced into Irish post-primary education in 1966 as a result of fast growing industrialisation and lower emigration rates (Andrews, 2011). The allocation of guidance counselling expanded to include all schools (NGF, 2007) and this system remained in place until Budget 2012. Within the context of a highly technicized model of education that is heavily influenced by a human capital formation perspective (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009) guidance counselling in Ireland occupies a unique position. The Green Paper on Education (DE, 1992, p.107) defined guidance as school services and activities that enable students to develop understanding of themselves and their talents and aids parents to "help their children to develop positive attitudes and behaviour and to make satisfying and fulfilling educational and career choices".

Ireland's membership of the European Union and successive reports on the country from the OECD (1991, 1997, 2002) have had a particular influence on the policy directions and reforms in Irish post-primary education and guidance counselling. Membership of the European Community has impacted significantly on the social and economic life of Ireland (Hantrais, 1995) and has aligned closely with OECD policy. There remains, however, a strong focus in the Irish Education system on higher education participation and achievement rates, participation rates in the physical sciences, and the increased involvement of employers groups in curriculum matters (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009). Such elements continue to indicate the prevailing

concern with the economic benefits of education and guidance. No aspect of the education system is potentially more easily aligned with this economic focus than guidance counselling, which "facilitates the allocation of life chances" (Watts, 1997, p.351). Indeed, critics have noted that the meaning of career guidance in particular has undergone a series of changes across the twentieth century as the realities of the economic and jobs market environment have changed (Barnes et al., 2011). In effect, as the shared understanding of 'career' has altered so too has the meaning and practice of delivery of career guidance (Barnes et al., 2011). Careers education and the availability of future career opportunities are viewed in terms of social environments, labour market segregation, family background, social position and cultural capital (Kidd, 2006).

It is worth noting that the changes to guidance counselling provision since Budget 2012 follow the same top down approach adopted in the introduction of previous initiatives in the Irish education system which have largely ignored the "school factor" (OECD, 1991, p.55). This has occurred despite repeated research findings that 'within school factors' are essential considerations for the effective implementation of reforms or education initiatives in schools (Callan, 1997; Gleeson et al., 2002; Jeffers, 2010). Fullan's (1993, p.1) conclusion regarding effective education reform that "visions die prematurely when they are mere paper products churned out by leadership teams" emphasises the need to consider schools as complex organisations prior to developing curricular initiatives. However, successive education reforms from the DES have been introduced without consideration of schools as "conditions of change" (Goodson, 2001, p.52). Earlier, the OECD (1991, p.55) concluded that "the school factor" had been largely ignored in Irish educational reform. In contrast, successive research studies have strongly demonstrated that schools are complex organisations and sites of contestation (Ball, 1987) where curriculum matters are constantly being reviewed and negotiated (Callan 2006; Gleeson, 2010).

Positive school cultures have been shown to encourage the development of a climate of support and encouragement and "a place where students and teachers like to be" (Hanson and Childs, 1998, p.15). Such schools are environments where there is a "shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students learn" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p.29). Such environments are also analogous to "organic schools" within Dalin's framework of school organization (Dalin, 1993). By comparison, in schools where there is a negative culture "negativity dominates conversations, interactions, and planning; where the only stories recounted are of failure" (Deal and Peterson, 1999, p.45). There is a significant existing literature charting the important influence that school culture has had on reform initiatives in Irish post-primary education. While contemporary educational reform in Ireland has tended to mirror the American experience of reform and has led to some change, profound change has been elusive (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009). Lynch and Lodge (2002, p.129) suggested that the culture of schools also varies significantly depending on the gender demographics of their student populations, with co-education and all boys schools characterised by "hegemonic masculinity". Callan (1997, p.1) has concluded that "effecting the learning environment of the school…requires concomitant developments in other aspects of the school (e.g. changes in scope and purposes of the various professional relationships in the school". In his examination of the implementation of the TY initiative, Jeffers (2010) noted the importance of leadership and organisation from school principals in supporting change

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in school practices and acceptance of the reform. The principal's own education values can also influence the introduction of change in schools (Jeffers, 2010) and the rest of the school community will often take their attitudinal cues from school leaders (Evans, 1996). It has been argued that principals are most effective in supporting change when they work closely with staff "to clarify and support the innovation, and they work collaboratively with other change agents (i.e. vice-principal and lead teachers) throughout the school year" (Fullan, 1991, p.154).

Research on educational reform has importantly found that school culture also plays a very significant role in *how* reforms are practically *implemented* in schools (Gleeson et al, 2002; Jeffers, 2010). Jeffers (2010) uses the term *"domestication"* to describe the process by which schools adapt educational reforms to suit their own vision of what they see as most appropriate for their students, and congruent with their distinct ethos and culture. However, mandated change is unlikely to be effective as "mandates alter some things, but they don't affect what matters" (Fullan, 1993, p. 38). In order for deep change to occur within complex organisations, such as schools, the culture of the school must be altered. Any change in schools alters the power dynamics and relationships that previously existed and "any educational reform that does not explicitly and courageously own up to issues surrounding changing patterns of power relationships is likely to fail" (Sarason, 1996, p. 31). In order for the culture of schools to adjust to supporting change, leadership must influence staff in such a way as to allow others to gain a sense of ownership with the goals and process of change.

The current changes instituted to guidance provision since the 2012 Budget re-allocation have displayed all the characteristics of previous top down educational reforms. Such an approach has also characterised much of the changes to the Irish educational system over the preceding quarter of a century (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009). It is also suggested that existing school cultures can colonise aspects of educational (and possibly guidance) provision in schools and transform them in ways more congruent with values of performativity and technicized human capital educational outputs (Gleeson et al., 2002; Jeffers, 2010). The developmental aspects of the guidance counsellor's role appear to be particularly vulnerable to such forces within some school settings (ICG, 2013, 2016; McCoy et al., 2006; NCGE, 2013). The 2012 re-allocation overtly transfers significant power to principals within schools to decide on allocations of teaching hours and various other supports toward the delivery of a guidance service (NCGE, 2013). This is directly contrary to previously expressed concerns from the OECD regarding the power of principals to modify guidance provision to meet local needs, values and agendas within schools (OECD, 1991). This situation also leaves guidance counselling services within schools vulnerable to inconsistencies across schools in the form provision takes. This is especially relevant given that existing research regarding the perceptions of principals in Irish post-primary schools toward guidance counselling suggest a lack of understanding or clarity regarding the specifics of the guidance counsellor's role in the school setting. McKenna et al. (1997) found that more than a third of school principals described their knowledge of guidance and counselling issues as inadequate. While the principals had a degree of nuance to their perceptions of guidance counsellor's work, recognising that a lot of good and valuable work was being done, concerns were evident about the isolationist nature of some guidance counsellor's work which was viewed as neither visible enough nor accountable in a formal way to themselves or other school stakeholders (McKenna et al., 1997).

However, it should be noted that there also exists a contrasting dynamic, at both policy and practice level, within the Irish Education system which emphasises a more holistic perspective of education (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009; Smyth and McCoy, 2011). The Irish Education Act (1998) placed holistic education as a central premise in post-primary education and emphasised the school's responsibility to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students. Seed (1992, p.42) defined holistic education as "engaging with the whole person of each child". The paradigm of holistic education challenges the view previously described that the function of education and training is knowledge transmission and to produce individuals suitable for the 'consumerist culture' (Best, 1990; Forbes, 2003; Miller, 2007). The cognitive development of young people is strengthened through a holistic approach to education where social, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of their development is nurtured (Jong and Kerr-Roubiecek, 2007; Weare, 2000). In Ireland this has been enhanced in the curriculum through the introduction of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) (DES 1997) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) (DES, 2000) in an attempt to address the DES stated mission of enabling individuals to achieve their full potential and to participate fully as members of society.

However, research on attitudes amongst teachers and school management about such curricular initiatives suggests that these subjects are seen as 'minnows' within schools in comparison to traditional exam subjects and are not accorded the same time or importance (Gleeson and Munnelly, 2003; Murphy, 2003). Further research demonstrates the complexity of implementing initiatives that do not align explicitly with the exam focused performative emphasis on measurable educational outputs. Findings from a study on the implementation of SPHE indicated that school principals viewed curriculum overload and time for coordination as key obstacles (Geary and Mannix-McNamara, 2003). Such findings are particularly relevant given the recent reforms in the Junior Cycle curriculum which will include a *Wellbeing* element incorporating SPHE, CSPE, Guidance and Physical Education (DES, 2016a).

Nevertheless, the promotion of curricular initiatives related to affective education such as SPHE is an area of contestation (Hayes and Ecclestone, 2008). Critics suggest that such approaches have taken primacy of place over subject knowledge and academic attainment in importance in schools and caste students in the role of passive and narcissistic "wounded individuals" (Hayes and Ecclestone, 2008 p.8). Conversely, given the fundamental emphasis on technical subject interests and the towering dominance of the terminal Leaving Certificate exam within the Irish education system, many aspects of a more holistic 'liberal arts' educational agenda have been marginalised (Moynihan et al., 2015). This speaks towards the influence of state examinations in the Irish education system on the one hand (OECD, 1991, 1997), and on the other the resilience of traditional pedagogies, beliefs and values in post-primary classrooms and the significance of school cultural factors (Callan, 1997, 2006; Mackey, 1998; Sheehan 2003).

Holistic education approaches recognise that the role of schools and staff is to care and nurture students (Best, 1990). The aim of the holistic education paradigm is both to educate the whole person and to emphasise the quality of human relationships within any community, inclusive of schools (Miller, 2007). In Ireland, 'guidance' and 'counselling' has often been used with 'pastoral

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care' discourse (Collins and McNiff, 1999). Pastoral care is a term described by Hui (2002) as a distinctly British notion that is closely linked to the welfare of the pupil and has become closely aligned with the discourse of schools as caring institutions (Lodge and Watkins, 1997). Pastoral care may be viewed as an 'umbrella term' incorporating aspects of curricular provision concerned with pupils' personal and social development with a teachers more general role of individualised care and counselling (Best, 1990). Lodge and Watkins (1997) emphasised the active aspect of pastoral care undertaken by teachers within schools. Recent research by Hearne and Galvin (2014) found that the majority of participating teachers in their study viewed pastoral care and student wellbeing support as a core element of their role but is an aspect that entails a significant time commitment and levels of understanding.

In recent years DES policy has sought to emphasise a collaborative and whole school responsibility to the provision of pastoral care, with the DES Inspectorate Report (2009) referring to schools that had a pastoral care team as models of good practice. Within this model, pastoral care becomes a function of the post-primary school that encompasses all school staff in its delivery, with particular staff being designated to fulfil particular aspects of pastoral care plan (DES, 2009). The overarching aim of such a pastoral care plan is to support students' personal, social and emotional development (Lohrmann et al., 2008; Rowe et al., 2007; Watkins, 1994). A whole school approach weaves pastoral care into the academic curriculum within the organisation of the school (Konu et al., 2002). This emphasis on a whole school approach with inclusive roles for school management, teachers and other school staff in the delivery of aspects of educational provision is mirrored in policy approaches for initiatives such as the TYP (Jeffers, 2010) and the more recent development of SST's (DES, 2014).

In particular, the Student Support Team initiative provides schools with guidelines in the design and implementation of a student support system, a system that "encompasses a range of supports that cater for the learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs of students" (DES, 2014, p.6). Drawing on previous documents such as *The Continuum of Support* (DES, 2010), *Wellbeing in Post-Primary School Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (DES, 2013a), *The Action Plan on Bullying* (DES, 2013b) and the establishment of SST's are conceived as an initiative to support a whole school approach to implementing many of the objectives traditionally associated with pastoral care. In some schools a "care team" comprising school staff with a specialist role, for example, the guidance counsellor, Year Head, Principal and Deputy Principal, may meet more regularly to address the needs of a small number of pupils with more complex needs. This smaller and more focused team may operate in parallel with the larger student support team and complement its work in meeting the learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs of the school's pupils (DES, 2014).

The literature on the area of a whole school approach to pastoral care and to guidance counselling emphasises that they both share the central aim of students' personal, social and emotional development (Lohrmann et al., 2008; Watkins, 1994). There is still a culture of Irish schools being remarkably undifferentiated with school management and administration being the domain of a small number of individuals, usually principals and deputy principals, and autonomous yet isolated teaching staff being primarily concerned with subject content (Jeffers, 2010). Some members of staff may consequently experience tensions between their

educational beliefs and their pedagogical practice in the classroom (Moynihan et al., 2015). This may be particularly relevant given the policy preference for a whole school approach to guidance counselling and the implementation of SST's. At a practical level, teachers and guidance counsellors involved in subjects such as SPHE and CPSE may experience challenges in operating within a post-primary education system philosophically divided.

With regard to the provision of guidance counselling, guidance has three strands; "personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance", and has two specific activities, namely guidance and counselling (DES, 2005a, p.4). Guidance aims to instil independence, responsibility and self-awareness in students and to support them to follow through on their choices (DES, 2005a). A further function of the guidance service is to address educational disadvantage and to support disabled students and international students (NCGE, 2004). The National Guidance Forum (NGF, p.13) defines guidance as facilitating 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". As these descriptions suggest, guidance is closely aligned with the transition from school to further and higher education, training or the workforce. As such, it has an obvious utility in supporting a close link between education and employment, with an explicit contribution from post-primary education toward economic development and productivity. It also has the potential to make overt contributions toward school wide measureable education outcomes such as participation in higher education amongst student populations (McGuinness et al., 2012). Additionally, guidance counselling has a potentially pivotal role in supporting students develop life competencies and career management skills (CMS) to deal with insecure employment across the lifespan (ELGPN, 2012; McCarthy, 2012; McGuinness et al., 2012).

Guidance counselling also emphasises counselling as an integral component of the guidance programme (DES, 2005a). This enables students to explore their inner thoughts and feelings, develop decision-making and problem-solving skills, as well as coping strategies, thus helping students to deal with any potential behavioural or personal difficulties (DES, 2005a; Hayes and Morgan, 2011; NCGE, 2004). In other words, some aspects of guidance counselling also align closely with SPHE and CPSE aspects of post-primary curriculum (Collins and McNiff, 1999) and do not mix well with the exam focus and emphasis on quantifiable and measurable educational outcomes that dominate educational discourse (Moynihan et al., 2015).

In 2001, the three year Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI) was introduced at a cost of €5 million in order to supplement existing guidance provision in schools. At this time guidance provision was provided on a pro rata basis of 22 hours of guidance counselling per week for schools with 500-799 students. This initiative allocated 50 extra full-time guidance posts to second level schools, benefitting 103 schools (NCGE, 2004). The initiative was extended for an additional two years in 2004 with an additional provision of 30 whole time equivalent posts, benefitting 78 schools (DES, 2006). Nonetheless, in spite of such welcome initiatives the 2002 OECD review of career guidance policies in Ireland found that while guidance counselling was well established in Ireland and comprised a strong core of supportive bodies, including the DES, NEPS and NCGE, there were a number of weaknesses in the system. In relation to post-primary, the OECD (2002) pointed out that the concept of 'appropriate guidance' had yet to be defined

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suggesting that the Irish Government needed to make "a clear statement, backed by resource decisions, that appropriate guidance includes access by all students to assistance with their career decision making and development" (p.9). It also recommended the need to rectify the lack of policies to ensure careers education was provided to all students, or that limited resources were not duplicated. Concerns that personal and social guidance was being prioritised over career guidance, inadequate monitoring systems to assess how guidance counsellors apportioned their time, and the decisions on allocation of their time to guidance in combination with other school subjects lay solely with the school principal were also highlighted (OECD, 2002). From an economic perspective, a number of ways to increase guidance resources in schools were put forward, namely; reduce the ratio of students to guidance counsellors or remove principal's autonomy to allocate guidance resources to teaching, and ensure that guidance resources are utilised solely for guidance activities (OECD, 2002). A stronger emphasis on the need for career guidance in the context of the Irish education system was articulated by the OECD (2004).

There is no formal curriculum for guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools (Connor, 2013). In 2004 and 2005 a number of publications were disseminated across the sector to support schools deliver guidance appropriately (DES, 2005a,b; NCGE, 2004) The allocation of hours for guidance provision is set out in the DES Circular (2005b) (*see Tables 4.2 and 4.3*).

The 2005 Circular (DES, 2005b) stated additional guidance hours could be allocated at the discretion of each school's own management from within the normal teacher allocation. Guidance was articulated as a 'whole school activity' and placed the responsibility for developing and implementing the school guidance plan on the whole school community, i.e. school management, staff members including the guidance counsellor, students and parents, as well as members of the local community including businesses and support services such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (DES, 2005c). The importance of the school guidance plan in facilitating access to a developmental guidance programme by all students was highlighted (DES, 2005a,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

Table 4.2: *Allocation of guidance for post-primary schools under Free Education/Block Grant Scheme (DES, 2005b)*

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

Table 4.3: *Allocation of guidance for all post-primary schools not under the Free Education/Block Grant Scheme (DES, 2005b)*

Nonetheless, the lack of an overall policy framework for guidance counselling provision in the post-primary sector was highlighted during this period (McCoy et al., 2006). In response, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2007) proposed a structured curriculum framework for whole school guidance provision. This framework recognised that even though not all students require one to one personal counselling, they should be able to access counselling support when necessary. However, the IGC (2008) asserted that curricular elements of guidance counselling, along with specific roles of staff, needed to be more clearly identified in the framework. Furthermore, there was some confusion in the NCCA curriculum in terms of the nature, timing and demand for personal counselling (IGC, 2008). The curriculum proposed by the NCCA never came to fruition indicating a possible lost opportunity for the development and expansion of guidance in the post primary sector (Hearne and Galvin, 2014).

Finally, the findings from the DES Inspectorate review of guidance counselling in 2009 from 55 Irish post-primary schools pointed to levels of good practice in the majority of the schools (DES, 2009). Specifically, most of them provided specific guidance classes for Senior Cycle students with guidance staff, while guidance classes for Junior Cycle were generally timetabled with other teaching staff such as SPHE teachers with limited input from guidance counsellors. In addition, the review indicated satisfactory levels of teaching and learning in most of the schools, and the majority of guidance staff held appropriate qualifications (DES, 2009).

4.1.4 RE-ALLOCATION OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING SINCE BUDGET 2012

Guidance counselling in Ireland has a long developmental history and has had to respond to the vicissitudes of policy over the last fifty years. For example, the 2012 Budget re-allocation of guidance counselling has had a significant impact on provision. Stoll and Fink (1996, p.80) argued that "those who introduce educational reforms or restructure education systems pay scant attention to social organisation and the context in which these changes are introduced". This claim appears to be particularly relevant to the Budget 2012 re-allocation of the ex-quota guidance provision.

In early 2012 a new DES Circular was disseminated to schools explicating the re-allocation of provision on an ex-quota basis from September 2012 (DES, 2012). School management were designated with the overall responsibility for decisions' on the allocation of guidance from within the standard staffing allocation. This now places significant power to alter the form and particulars of the individual schools guidance programmes in line with the overall aims and ethos of the school. The DES (2012) reiterated the importance of guidance as a whole school activity and the need for schools to develop a school guidance plan in order to appropriately support students. It placed the guidance counsellor at the centre of guidance planning, but highlighted the importance of other stakeholders including all staff and management. The identification of clear roles and responsibilities of each member of the school community, including students and parents, is stressed as essential features of guidance. In this way, the DES (2012) argued that schools could improve how they utilised their current guidance resources.

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However, while the DES Circular stated that "guidance continues to remain a statutory requirement for schools under the Education Act, 1998" (DES, 2012, p.4), it did not offer specific recommendations on how guidance should be allocated within the school system. Instead, it was left up to the management bodies to produce a framework for provision in such a lacuna (ACCS et al., 2012). Overall, the ACCS et al. (2012) framework reinforced the policy of the DES that guidance counselling is a whole school activity and that all stakeholders should be involved in both the *planning* and *delivery* of provision. It specifically offered approaches by which schools might meet their statutory requirements, for example, regarding the number of hours for group and one to one guidance counselling to meet student's needs. It also reiterated that students receiving personal counselling over a protracted period should be referred to external services. While such a framework allows for some flexibility in tailoring services to individual needs, it may also contribute to inconsistent levels of provision (Connor, 2013). This is now apparent in the emerging evidence that suggests the three dimensional approach to guidance counselling provision, i.e. personal and social, educational and career, is inconsistently applied across schools with reported difficulties in maintaining appropriate services in the post 2012 re-allocation environment (IGC, 2016; NCGE, 2013).

A particular concern about the impact of the 2012 re-allocation is the inability of schools to meet the personal dimension aspect of guidance counselling provision (ASTI, 2013, IGC, 2016; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). Longitudinal research exploring student's values and perceptions of guidance provision in post-primary education has revealed that students place enormous value on individual counselling, with many raising concerns about the lack of time for such sessions and guidance in general (McCoy et al., 2014). In particular, McCoy et al. (2014) have highlighted students' anxiety about being unable to access relevant information about options available outside of those relating to higher education, or related to career opportunities following courses of study.

Interestingly, within a number of months of the 2012 re-allocation, two policy documents related to student wellbeing were circulated to schools by the DES. The first one, *Wellbeing in Post Primary Schools; Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention in Post Primary Schools* (DES, 2013a), emphasised the importance of the guidance service and the pivotal role of the guidance counsellor in ensuring that student's needs are met. However, the IGC (2013) argued that this responsibility places additional pressure on guidance counsellors who are already stretched beyond their capacity. The second publication *Action Plan on Bullying* (DES, 2013b) lends further support for the need to prioritise access to guidance and whole school guidance planning. However, given the lowly status reported for subjects such as SPHE and CSPE in the rational technical Irish post primary school system (Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin, 2009) and the increasing workload reported for teachers across many schools (McCoy et al., 2014), there may be significant challenges in implementing these initiatives.

As a consequence of the Budget 2012 re-allocation, concerns about the adequate provision of 'appropriate guidance' necessary for students to achieve their full potential prompted the initiation of four national audits by the IGC between 2011/2012 and 2015/2016 (IGC, 2016). The findings in the audits substantiate the IGC's concerns, especially with regard to the reduction in one-to-one student counselling work from 12.0 hours to 5.59 hours per week, which represents

a decrease in service of 53.5%. This may lead to a lack of access to guidance counsellors for students in times of need. Furthermore, the findings indicate an overall reduction in guidance provision of 27.6%, with reported increases in academic subject teaching by guidance counsellors. Mean weekly hours for individual counselling decreased from 12 hours in 2011 to 5.59 hours in 2015 (IGC, 2016). Similar findings were reported by the NCGE (2013) with reductions in guidance provision of 25.8% leading to recommendations to the DES to prioritise the restoration of guidance provision on an ex-quota basis.

A number of other surveys carried out by representative bodies confirm the impact of the re-allocation on the school organisation and the recipients of guidance. Findings by the JMB (2012) indicate that a number of coping strategies have had to be employed by schools to try to deal with the re-allocation. Its survey indicates that 52.4% of schools allocated extra mainstream subject teaching duties to guidance counsellors, while 34.1% of schools reported reductions in their provision of subject choice and other courses. Furthermore, 24.6% of schools reported merging Higher and Ordinary Level classes in some subject areas, while 28.6% of schools reduced or eliminated timetabled guidance classes for some year groups in order to maximise the time available for individual counselling. In addition, 45.2% of schools reported increasing class sizes so as to increase the teaching hours available and reduce the effect on guidance provision.

The ASTI (2013) has reported that 78% of schools had altered guidance services following the removal of ex-quota guidance provision, with reductions of individual counselling provision reported in 70% of schools. The TUI (2014) survey of 125 schools and Colleges of Further Education found that 42% reported a rise in student population and a conflicting diminution in guidance provision. Disconcertingly, guidance counselling work was reported to be undertaken by non-guidance staff in 30% of cases. Of those cases, 60% involved personnel who were external to the school, while the remaining 40% comprised other staff members in the school. While increases in the number of guidance classes were reported in 86% of schools, reductions in one-to-one and group appointments were reported in 93% of schools (TUI, 2014). Finally, despite research illustrating the pivotal role of the guidance counsellor in guiding students during Junior Cycle to shape their future outcomes (Smyth and Calvert, 2011), students in these year group cycles continue to be particularly disenfranchised (Hearne et al., 2016; IGC, 2013). The deficiency of guidance in Junior Cycle may have detrimental effects on students, due to lack of information around subject and career choices, as well as an absence of education around early school leaving (McCoy et al., 2006).

4.2 A WHOLE SCHOOL GUIDANCE APPROACH TO
GUIDANCE COUNSELLING: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
OF STAKEHOLDERS

The concept of guidance as a whole school responsibility is not new. In its 1992 *Green Paper on Education,* the Department of Education (DE, p.107) proposed guidance as a "school-wide responsibility, involving the collaboration of the school administration, the guidance counsellor and the other teachers", with the guidance counsellor at the centre of this process. In 1994, the *Report on the National Education Convention* (Coolahan, 1994) recognised the central role of psychological and guidance services in schools, and emphasised the need for greater educational guidance at primary and post-primary level. Following these developments, the DES *White Paper: Charting Our Education Future* (DES, 1995) emphasised the importance of providing students with access to guidance, counselling and pastoral care at all levels. It advocated the delivery of guidance through short courses or classes, as opposed to full timetabling such as exists for core subjects. Guidance counsellors' contribution to special education programme development and the importance of a whole school approach to teaching methodology was also emphasised (DES, 1995).

A further push for a whole school approach to guidance counselling came in 1996 from the NCGE where guidance was articulated as a "whole school enterprise" (NCGE, 1996, p.4). Two years later, the Education Act (1998) placed the responsibility firmly on the school to "ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices" (9c), as well as "promote the social and personal development of the students….in consultation with their parents" (9d). The involvement of parents and students in the development of the school plan and setting of objectives and goals is clearly outlined, as well as forming cooperative relationships with the wider community. More recently, the whole school approach has gained more ground in Irish guidance policy discourse (DES, 2005a; 2012).

However, while a whole school approach to guidance is presented as a policy for guidance provision, its rationale is complex (Lam and Hui, 2010). The process of attempting to balance the emphasis on infusing guidance themes into an academic curriculum while simultaneously aiming to address the individual social and personal development of individual students is complicated (Watkins, 1994). Both of these aspects need to be addressed so as to involve all teachers and students in the whole school approach. This approach can be viewed as supporting a "humanistic" perspective, which stresses the "potential value and goodness" of human beings and "seeks a solely rational way" to address human problems (Hobson, 2004 p.211). However, critics have suggested this curricular approach to the delivery of guidance in Ireland has been adopted because it adheres to the already dominant discrete curricular structure in Ireland (Moynihan et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, the model of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in Ireland aligns closely with westernised humanistic approaches that conceptualise the integrations of guidance themes within the curriculum (McGuinness, 1998; Watkins, 1994). The notion of guidance as exchanges merely between the guidance counsellor and student is replaced by

the concept of guidance that is "more embedded in the daily life of the organisation and the core activities of the school" (Watkins, 1994, p. 171). In Ireland, post primary schools students' are supported by an embedded guidance counselling service with guidance counsellors central to the process (IGC, 2013, 2016). The concept of a whole school approach is not unique to the domain of guidance counselling. Policy direction by the DES in encouraging schools to move away from territorial divisions in aspects of school provision and embrace a more favourable whole school approach is reflected as far back as 1999, and clearly articulated in *A Guide to Whole-School Evaluation in Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2006). A whole school approach has extended to other areas of education and the curriculum, for example, in *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011). With regards to guidance the recent draft guidelines for public consultation on the theme of *Wellbeing in Junior Cycle* refers to a whole school approach in the new Junior Cycle curriculum (NCCA, 2016). All of these developments place the whole school approach firmly at the heart of any proposed initiatives or policy changes.

Various definitions of guidance counselling are present in Irish policy discourse (DES, 2005a; NGF, 2007). Within a school context, counselling incorporates personal, educational and career counselling and aligns closely with the OECD (2004) proposition that students are to be supported through guidance services to develop effective coping and decision making skills. Counselling is also an important support for helping students deal with any potential behavioural or personal difficulties. Hayes and Morgan (2011) defined counselling in the context of guidance as "professional support to help those experiencing personal difficulties to promote their personal growth and wellbeing" (p. 4). However, given the reported impact of individual counselling on the remaining allocation of time for the delivery of other aspects of guidance counselling, a schools' ability to provide *appropriate* guidance counselling to students can be severely impacted (OECD, 2002). Additionally, crisis counselling requires significant specialist training for effective implementation and this aspect of the role may be beyond the remit of 'regular' teachers and school management within the student support or pastoral care frameworks in schools (Hearne and Galvin, 2014).

In whole school guidance, a number of facilitating factors have been identified including roles, responsibilities and competencies of staff, teacher dedication, communication and team spirit which strongly suggest that local variables and resource allocations are very important in supporting a whole school approach to effective guidance counselling provision (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hui, 2002). Overall, despite its size, Ireland has a complex system of post-primary education comprising a range of school types with both public and private ownership. All, however, offer a comprehensive curriculum devised nationally but have the freedom to provide education in a way that aligns with their own ethos, or characteristic spirit (Daly, 2012).

At a broader level, the provision of guidance differs from one country to the next depending on organisational and professional structures. Additionally, the qualification requirements and training of guidance professionals varies considerably from country to country across the European Union (NICE, 2012; Volmari, et al., 2009). In many cases, guidance professionals are initially trained as teachers or as psychologists and follow up with postgraduate training in guidance. The differences in the professional identity of guidance professionals internationally

are also expressed in the role definition of the guidance counsellor from one country to another (NICE, 2012). Common conceptual distinctions are expressed in the type of guidance offered by practitioners. While *educational guidance* is concerned with supporting student decisions regarding educational options and learning problems, *career guidance* focuses on student decisions regarding occupations and work roles. *Personal and social* guidance aims to support students with problems of a behavioural nature or emotional issues (DES, 2005a; Liston, 2011; NCGE, 2004). However, research focusing on the views of practitioners found that many guidance counsellors viewed the counselling and guidance aspects of their role as being separate and discrete entities (Ryan, 1993).

Breathnach (2000) suggests whether or not a profession is recognised depends heavily on how it is perceived by the public and practitioners', along with the manner in which the practitioners undertake their work. Bimrose (2006) emphasised the importance of clear communication of the professional identity and framework of competencies to support the professionalized status of guidance practitioners' and support their professional practice. However, with regard to the professional role of the Irish guidance counsellor, McCoy et al. (2006, p.91) noted that "schools varied widely in the nature of the guidance counsellor's role". This suggests a strong influence from the local 'school factor' across school settings but it may also purport to a lack of clarity regarding aspects of the role of the guidance counsellor. McCarthy (2001) also suggested that differences in training and education received by individual practitioners'; depending on where they received their guidance qualification, might also have an influence on the divergences in practice across school settings. Certainly, Sultana (2004, p.44) has described the guidance counselling community as a "truncated profession", and the OECD (2004) identified significant variability in training provision for guidance and noted its effect on professional identity.

Linked to the issue of training and qualifications is the discourse on practitioner competencies which has gained momentum in Ireland and abroad in recent years. Hamblin (1974) has emphasised the importance of 'personality qualities' rather than 'competencies' in guidance counsellor practice. Heibert (2008) has proposed an international competencies framework that comprises a selection of core competencies including client advocacy, awareness of client cultural differences, designing, implementing and evaluating guidance and counselling programmes. At a European level a concerted effort has taken place under the direction of the NICE network in the form of a framework outlining the classification of six core competencies relating to the professional role of career guidance and counselling professionals are: Career Information and Assessment, Career Education, Social Systems Interventions and Development, Professionalism, Programme and Service Management and Career Counselling (*see Fig. 4.2*).

Career Information & Assessment

Describes the core competence of CGC professionals to support people in assessing their personal characteristics and needs and connecting them with information on opportunities and requirements in labour markets and education systems.

Career Counselling

Describes the core competence of CGC professionals to support their clients in understanding their situations, in working towards solutions and in making decisions through the use of ideographic and reflective methods

Programme & Service Management

Describes the core competence of CGC professionals to ensure and develop the quality of their organisations' service.

Career Education

Describes the core competence of CGC professionals to teach and train people to develop the career management competencies they need for managing education, training and career transitions.

Social Systems Interventions & Development

Describes the core competence of CGC professionals to support their clients by making a difference in education and work related environments (preventively and in crisis-management) through networking, consultation and advocacy.

Professionalism

Describes the core competence of CGC professionals to teach and train people to develop the career management competencies they need for managing education, training and career transitions.

Figure 4.2: *Classification of competencies for career guidance and counselling professionals across EU (Source: NICE, 2012, p.54).*

By comparison, in Ireland the NICE (2012) core competencies are found across the three domains (personal and social, educational and career) of the holistic model of the guidance counselling (DES, 2005a, 2012; NCGE 2004). Both the IGC (2008) and the NCGE (1996) articulated the guidance counsellor's role as being made up the three interlinking competencies:

1. Personal Counselling; Personal and social skills
2. Educational Counselling: Choices, subjects, courses and levels
3. Career Counselling: Choices, vocational education and training

However, both organisations have highlighted the difficulties of integrating the discrete aspects of the role into a school setting. The five competency areas proposed by the NGF (2007) are:

1. Theory and practice of vocational educational and personal/social guidance across the lifespan
2. Labour market education and training
3. Counselling
4. Information and resource management
5. Professional practice

The NGF (2007) also emphasises the important place of counselling skills in the role which relies on competencies such as "empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard" in supporting clients in making choices (NGF, 2007, p.15). Indeed, the NGF (2007, p.35) holds that "the personal qualities of guidance counsellors are considered one of the main strengths of the guidance services in post-primary schools", such qualities being approachability, flexibility, commitment and hard work.

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The NCCA (2007) *Draft Curriculum Framework for Guidance in Post-Primary Schools* suggests a coherent strategy for the integration of a range of curricular experiences within the formal structure of the curriculum. This approach highlighted the discrete or collaborative responsibilities of the whole school community in the provision of an appropriate guidance service within a whole school approach model (*see Fig.4.3*). The NCCA *Guidance Whee*l illustrates the interrelatedness of the range of stakeholders in the delivery of a "multi-faceted, collaborative approach for the guidance provision" with the guidance counsellor positioned at the centre of the process (NCCA, 2007, p.6). However, significant concerns regarding the erosion of the personal counselling dimension of guidance counselling were expressed by the IGC (2008) at the time and it proposed its own framework (*see Fig. 4.4*).
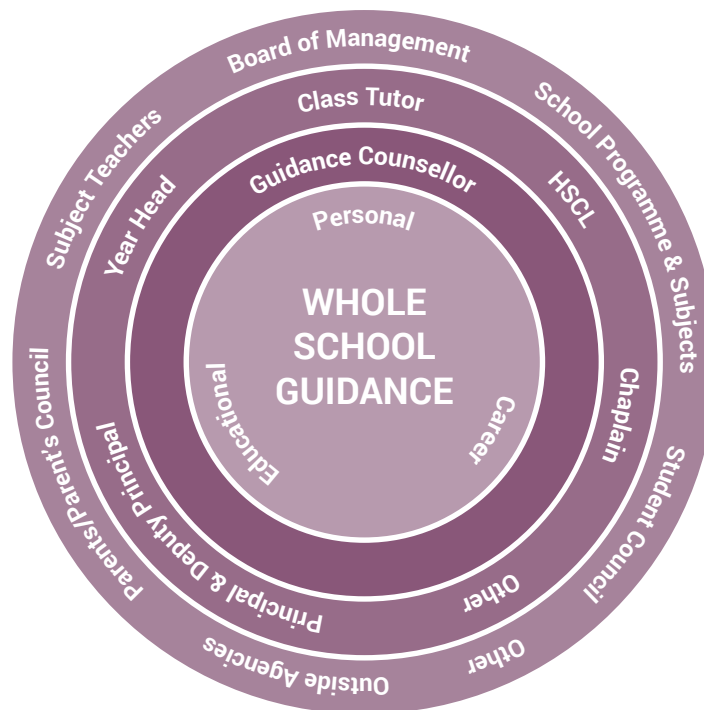
Fig. 4.3: *The Guidance Wheel (Source: NCCA, 2007, p.6)*

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

GUIDANCE SERVICE and CURRICULAM SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Figure 4

**Principal
Deputy Principal
Year Heads
Class Tutors
Chaplain
Home school Liason
Subject teachers
Etc.**

Guidance & Counselling Service (Education Act, 1998)

Figure 1

Remit of Guidance Counsellor with whole school support

Key Services
Individual and Group Counselling for Personal, Educational and Vocational Concerns

Psychometric test Administration, interpretation and results feedback

Development of Whole School Guidance Plan

Work with parents

Referral

Whole School Curricular Guidance Programe

Figure 2

Involves whole School Staff, including Guidance Counsellor where appropriate to School Guidance Plan

Includes: SPHE, elements of CSPE, LCA and LCVP. All subject teachers can contribute.

Links with Outside Agencies:

Opportunity Providers, Agencies, Referral sources, etc.

Figure 5

Fig. 4.4: *The roles and relationships of the members of a whole school approach to guidance (Source: IGC, 2008)*

Some of the principles underpinning the school guidance programme are that it should be accessible, needs-responsive and recognised as a whole school responsibility (NCGE, 2004). It is demarcated as "the specific set of learning experiences which a school provides in response to the guidance needs of its students" (NCGE, 2004 p.8). The involvement of all stakeholders, including all staff, parents and students in planning and developing a guidance programme, is essential in order to produce well-developed guidance plans that effectively utilise school resources in order to meet the needs of students (NCGE, 2004). However, one of t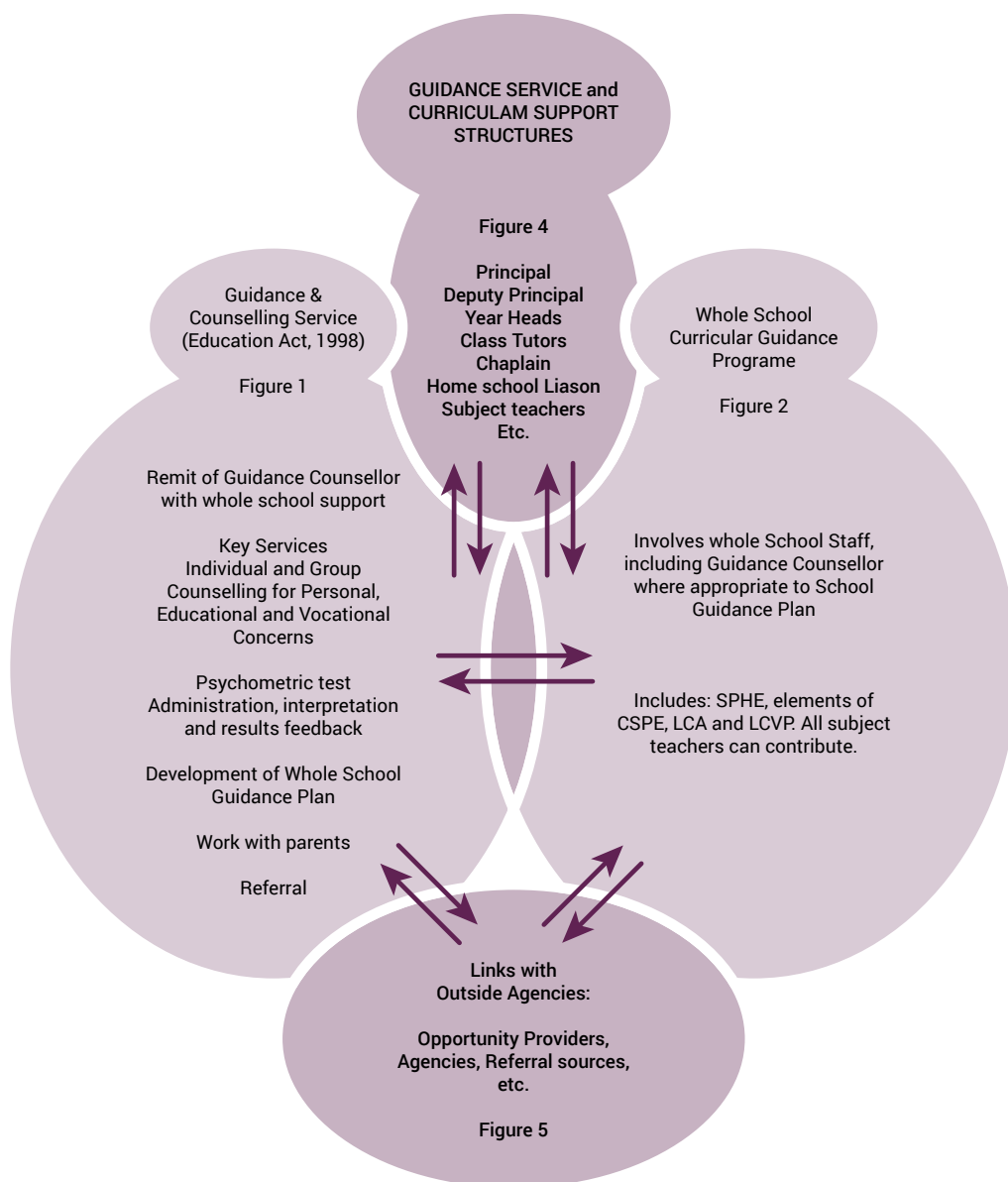he key issues with regard to the whole school approach model is attitudes to collaboration amongst the school community. McCoy et al.'s (2006) study on the delivery of guidance services within Irish post primary schools found that the majority of schools reported lower levels of collaboration amongst school staff with respect to guidance, with many practitioners working alone. Furthermore, a lack of clarity about the guidance counsellor's role and position within the school and its relationship to pastoral care, the absence of school guidance plans in some schools and inadequate time for staff to meet were hampering this time of collaborative delivery (McCoy et al., 2006).

A school guidance plan is necessary in order to execute a whole school model effectively. The plan is defined as "the document in which the school, in a systematic way, defines the guidance programme it offers, and states how resources are organised to deliver the programme" (DES, 2005a, p.5). The guidance plan should incorporate the main guidance aims and goals of the school, while clearly identifying the target group for guidance and clear description of the guidance-related activities and resources (DES, 2005a). However, it has been found that over 60% of schools investigated had no written guidance plan, and schools in the GEI were more likely to have such a plan (McCoy et al., 2006).

4.2.1   THE ROLE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR

The IGC (1998) *Role Document* states that the role of the guidance counsellor is "to engage in personal, educational, and vocational counselling with clients throughout the lifespan, in the particular circumstances of their life" (p.3). More recently, the IGC (2008) has articulated that the overriding function of the school guidance and counselling service is to ensure the implementation of the requirements of the Education Act (1998). According to the IGC (2008) two clear strands to the role of the guidance service are proposed; firstly, "the provision of a responsive service, staffed by trained guidance counsellors, to meet student's needs, as they emerge throughout the student's time in school" (p.4). Secondly, the development of a curricular guidance programme that is enriching, protective and needs-appropriate and is "integrated and proactive manner in a whole school context" (IGC, 2008, p.5). *Figure 4.5* displays the range of guidance activities that come under the remit of the school guidance service (NCGE, 2004). The specific areas of activities that guidance counsellors are responsible for are helping students make choices and manage transitions, as well as the achievement of guidance service and organisational aims.

Guidance Activities that help students make choices	Guidance Activities that help students to make transitions	Other Guidance Activities that support achievement of aims of school guidance programme
Educational Development Programmes	Careers education/career transition programmes	Consultation (with parents, staff and students)
Assessment	Placement	Feedback
Information	Follow-Up	Networking
Advice		Promoting Change
Personal and Social Development Programmes Counselling		Managing, organising and coordinating guidance activities
Referral (both by the GC to external agencies and internally by staff to the GC).		

Fig. 4.5: *Guidance activities carried out by the guidance counsellor (Source: NCGE, 2004)*

Nonetheless, the lack of a "clear standardised framework for guidance" at post-primary level has resulted in guidance counsellors carrying out roles of a wide and varied nature which may have added to the inconsistencies in guidance provision and guidance programme content (McCoy et al., 2006, p.190). With regard to the issue of personal counselling as part of the role it has been proposed that guidance counsellors should provide personal counselling around a wide variety of issues where these are deemed to be of a serious nature, such as disclosures of suicidal ideation, addiction, sexual abuse or severe mental health, the guidance counsellor should refer students to the appropriate specialised professionals (NGF, 2007). This has now been more closely described as 'crisis' situations by the DES (DES, 2012). However, Hayes and Morgan (2011) highlighted a number of discrepancies in role delineation with regards to the counselling dimension: the number of students seen for counselling; number of sessions provided; number of guidance counsellors available in schools; and the amount of time allocated to each element of counselling. They also found that guidance counsellors did not feel adequately supported in their counselling role, and suggested that incorporating the views and opinions of students and parents might be beneficial for counselling.

4.2.2 ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT, STAFF AND EDUCATION PARTNERS

In addition to the guidance counsellor, a number of other key stakeholders are involved in a whole school approach to guidance counselling. According to the NCGE (2004), the BOM and school management team are responsible for overseeing guidance provision by working collaboratively with the guidance counsellor and school staff to manage guidance planning and ensure its consistent implementation. Subject teachers may support students by providing relevant subject advice for careers and through formal management or pastoral care roles. On a more informal level, students may actively seek out certain teachers for advice or consultation and teachers, are then within their rights to seek advice from the guidance services for matters that are deemed outside of their own competencies (NCGE, 2004). The findings of one school case study carried out in Spring 2012 on the role of regular teachers in a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hearne and Galvin, 2014) revealed that although 80% of teacher participants identified pastoral care as a central role of their work, they reported

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an inadequate level of pastoral care training throughout their teacher training and teaching career. The need for a whole school approach was deemed to be pressing by some participants, particularly in providing a united staff response in the face of serious issues or problems. More recently, Hearne et al. (2016) report that due to staff shortages some teachers are hesitant to be involved in pastoral care and student support activities due to time pressures and increased paperwork. They also found a general lack of awareness amongst some teachers of the existence of the school Guidance Plan and referral procedures to the school guidance service.

Parents are also often identified as being highly influential in the career decision making process of young adults (DES, 1995; McCoy et al., 2014), and viewed as "integral partners in the education of their child" (NCGE, 2004, p.149). Parents play a vital role in guidance programme support and development by engaging in dialogue with the guidance counsellor and school staff; taking part in school guidance events or meetings; assisting in the development of the guidance plan and, where possible, personally help in the delivery of the guidance programme (NCGE, 2004). Career-related parental support can be an important process in the promotion of young people's career development as it contributes to the student's home environment in terms of values, attitudes and general lifestyle (Zhang et al., 2015). However, while Irish parents are the main source of advice for students considering options at school completion, they are seldom a decisive influence (McCoy et al., 2014).

Students should also be involved in in the guidance programme and the development of the school guidance plan (NCGE, 2004). Through bodies such as the Student Council students can voice their opinions on the essential elements of the guidance programme and provide valuable feedback on provision (NCGE, 2004). Finally, the external community also has a role in the career development and learning of young people through the provision of work-related experiences and opportunities (Barnes et al., 2011). It is also highlighted as important in the school guidance programme, as it provides important resources in terms of information and support for young people, particularly in the areas of higher education, employment options and training (NCGE, 2004).

4.3 CONCLUSION

In the last five decades, the development of a comprehensive school guidance counselling service in the Irish post-primary sector has been a complicated and unpredictable process which is mainly due to the value placed on it by policymakers. The service has evolved in response to educational and employment policy, national economic developments and the emerging personal and societal needs of young people. However, research in the last two decades has repeatedly expedited inconsistencies in the provision of guidance counselling in schools. While a whole school approach to guidance counselling is considered best practice and strongly advocated, both nationally and internationally, the evidence suggests that in Ireland it is somewhat patchy and dependent on a range of factors including school designation and ethos, stakeholder roles and responsibilities' and the availability of adequate resources. In the aftermath of the 2012 Budget re-allocation there is consistent evidence of diminished and fragmented guidance provision during a period when Governmental policies stress the need for a whole school responsibility to student wellbeing. The primary findings from this single case study of one voluntary school are addressed next.

Section 5
Primary Findings of Case Study

The primary findings from the four data sources in the case school are presented in this section:

1: Online survey with teaching and support staff;
2: Interviews with the school management, Guidance Counsellor and past students;
3: Focus groups with current students and parents of students;
4: Naturalistic observations of guidance counselling activities.

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5.1 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGY

A number of methods were used to analyse the data from the four data sources. Quantitative descriptive data from the online survey was analysed in SurveyMonkey software which is particularly appropriate for use with a closed population such as school employees (Gwartney, 2007). This allowed the analysis of variables such as frequencies, age, gender, cross referencing and other relevant data. The ordinal data was collated and converted into visual graphical representations of the data from participant responses. The scales used and the demographics obtained also contributed toward increasing the reliability of the conclusions of this research (Biemer and Lyberg, 2003). The qualitative data from the open ended questions in the survey and the interviews and focus groups was coded and analysed using Braun and Clarke's six phase framework (2012) for qualitative thematic data analysis:

Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data
Phase 2: Generating initial codes
Phase 3: Searching for themes
Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes
Phase 6: Producing the case report

Following initial coding of the data, a cycle of analysis was carried out by the research team (McLeod, 2014). The preliminary findings from the different data sources were examined individually followed by a group discussion on the discrete interpretations of the data over a period of time. These interpretations were then integrated through the lens of the research questions which informed the emergence of rich and deep understandings of the case. This recursive process provided a forum for each member of the research team to bring their own perspective and knowledge to the process and supported group reflexivity and rigor in the interpretation of the emerging data and overall findings (McLeod, 2014).

5.2 DATA SOURCE 1: ONLINE SURVEY WITH TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF

The data presented in this section is drawn from the results of the online survey disseminated to a total population of 61 teaching and support staff. The school Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and ancillary staff were not included in the survey. The survey generated a final response rate of 61% (n=37) after three administration phases. However, approximately respondents 20% (n=12) of total responders stopped completion of the survey following the demographic questions in Section 1. In addition, a further 5% (n=3) stopped responding from question 14 in Section 3 onwards.

5.2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This section presents the demographic data generated from Questions 1 to 4. The findings from Question 1 show that the majority of respondents were teaching staff (89% / n=33), while only 11% (n=4) of respondents were support staff. The data from Question 2 indicates that 73% (n=27) of respondents had been teaching in the school for less than 10 years, and 8% (n=3) nearly 20 years or more. The data from Question 3 indicates that over 72% (n=26) of respondents were teaching staff, while 28% (n=11) were support staff (*see Fig. 5.1*).
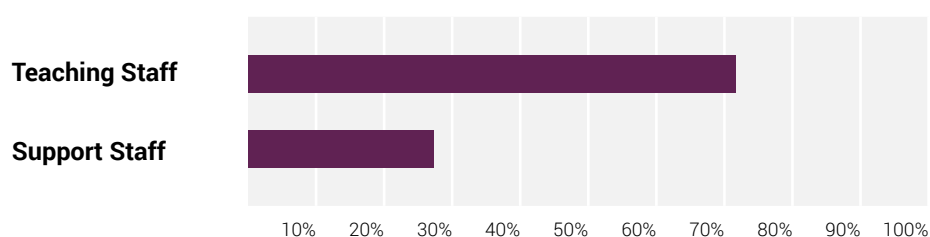

Fig. 5.1: *Q.3 - Staff designation*

The 32 responses to Question 4 indicate that many of the respondents were teaching across a range of year groupings with the highest being 84% (n=27) teaching 3rd years, while the lowest was 59% (n=19) teaching 6th year students (*see Fig. 5.2*).
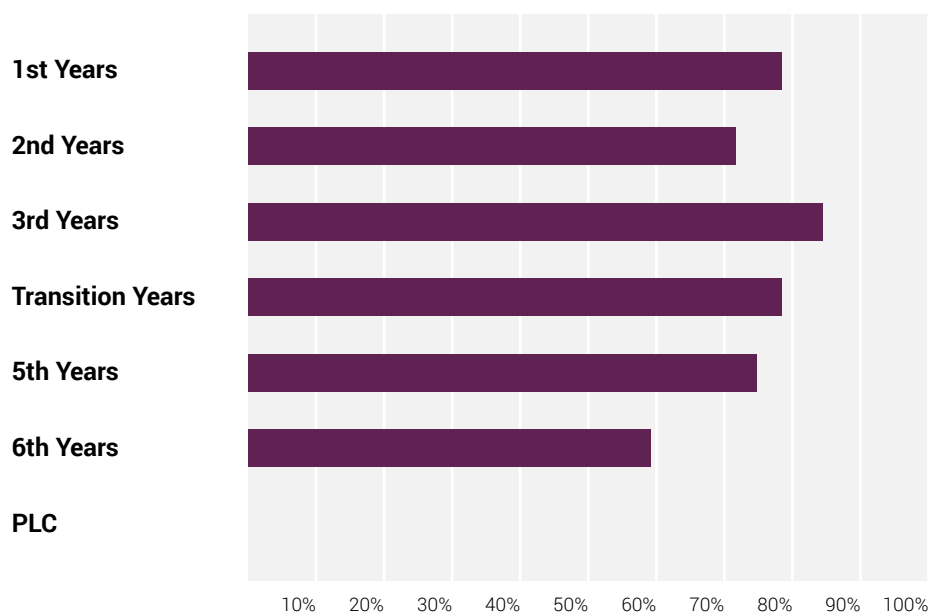

Fig. 5.2.: *Q.4 - Year groupings taught by respondents*

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5.2.2 PERCEPTIONS OF A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

This section presents the data related to the respondent's views on the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the case school (Questions 5-10). In total, 59% (n=22) of respondents answered this question. The data in *Fig. 5.3* (Q.5) indicates that 63% (n=14) of respondents believed there is a whole school approach, while 36% (n=8) believe there is not.
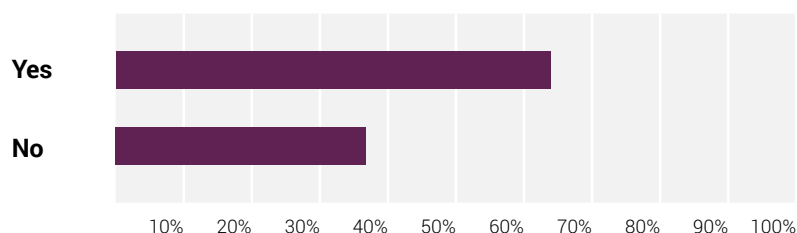

Fig. 5.3: *Q 5 - Knowledge of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school*

More detailed qualitative comments were provided by 14 respondents to Question 5. Some respondents described the guidance service as being about *"more than just the Guidance Counsellor"*. Others referred to the influence of a *"supportive staff"*, *"...the teaching staff, management and parents are active participants"* in creating an *"open and understanding environment"*. This environment involves *"not solely the Guidance Counsellor who is undertaking roles",* but also staff members in *"pastoral care roles".* Other respondents referred their role as mentors to the students, which is part of the school's Whole School Guidance Programme, as a way of being involved in a whole school approach to guidance counselling. Respondents also indicated that the school encourages students to contact teachers in their pastoral care role to *"take advantage of the fact that they can talk to any member of staff that they feel most comfortable with"*. Two respondents indicated that they were unaware of the presence of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the school. One respondent also suggested that not all staff were willing to participate in a pastoral care role, stating *"probably 50/50"*. According to another respondent, *"some staff ignore students difficulties"* and *"just pass it [a concern] on to the Guidance Counsellor".* In addition, respondent's views on the referral procedures to the school guidance service were mixed. Some respondents have used these procedures successfully to provide information about students to the Guidance Counsellor. One suggested there is *"no clear process"* and that *"...a chain of referral is completely absent"*, and another respondent stated the process is *"very blurred"*. Another respondent stated that staff *"often don't hear back"* about a referral made and are told that *"the information is confidential"* by the Guidance Counsellor.

Question 6 which asked respondents to describe their understanding of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the case school generated a 53% (n=19) response rate. One respondent suggested it involves *"all teachers playing a part"* while another stated it means that guidance has become *"everyone's responsibility"*. A different respondent clarified that "*no one teacher is responsible for career guidance"*, and all staff should *"respond"* to student requests for support or guidance. This was echoed by another respondent, *"each staff member has a role in guidance, SNA's teachers, form tutors, year heads, principal, deputy principal".* Another respondent concurred with this view but suggested it needed to be widened to involve "*the wider school community*", including "*families*". Another professed that "*one person with overall responsibility*" for the school guidance service is ideal, whilst other staff should be involved in a whole school approach to guidance counselling "*at different but clear stages*". Two respondents indicated that they had *"no formal understanding"* of what a whole school approach to guidance counselling involved. Observations provided by respondent's regarding their involvement in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school suggest various understandings of guidance counselling. Some indicated that guidance counselling focuses mainly on students' education and career goals, such as *"promoting college"*, *"career pathways"* or questions *"related to a particular course"*. There was also a value placed on promoting *"student wellbeing"* and *"welfare",* which echoes the pastoral care role in responses to Question 5.

Figure 5.4 displays the data from Question 7 regarding respondent's views on which stakeholders should be involved in the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. The total response rate of 65% (n=24) indicates a significant variety of stakeholders must be involved. The most prominent is the Guidance Counsellor (84%; n=21), followed by school management, i.e. Principal and Deputy Principal, at 68% (n=17), Year Heads (64%; n=16), teachers (64%; n=16) and the Home School Liaison Officer (60%; n=15). Conversely, 28% (n=7) of respondents indicated they did not know who should be involved.
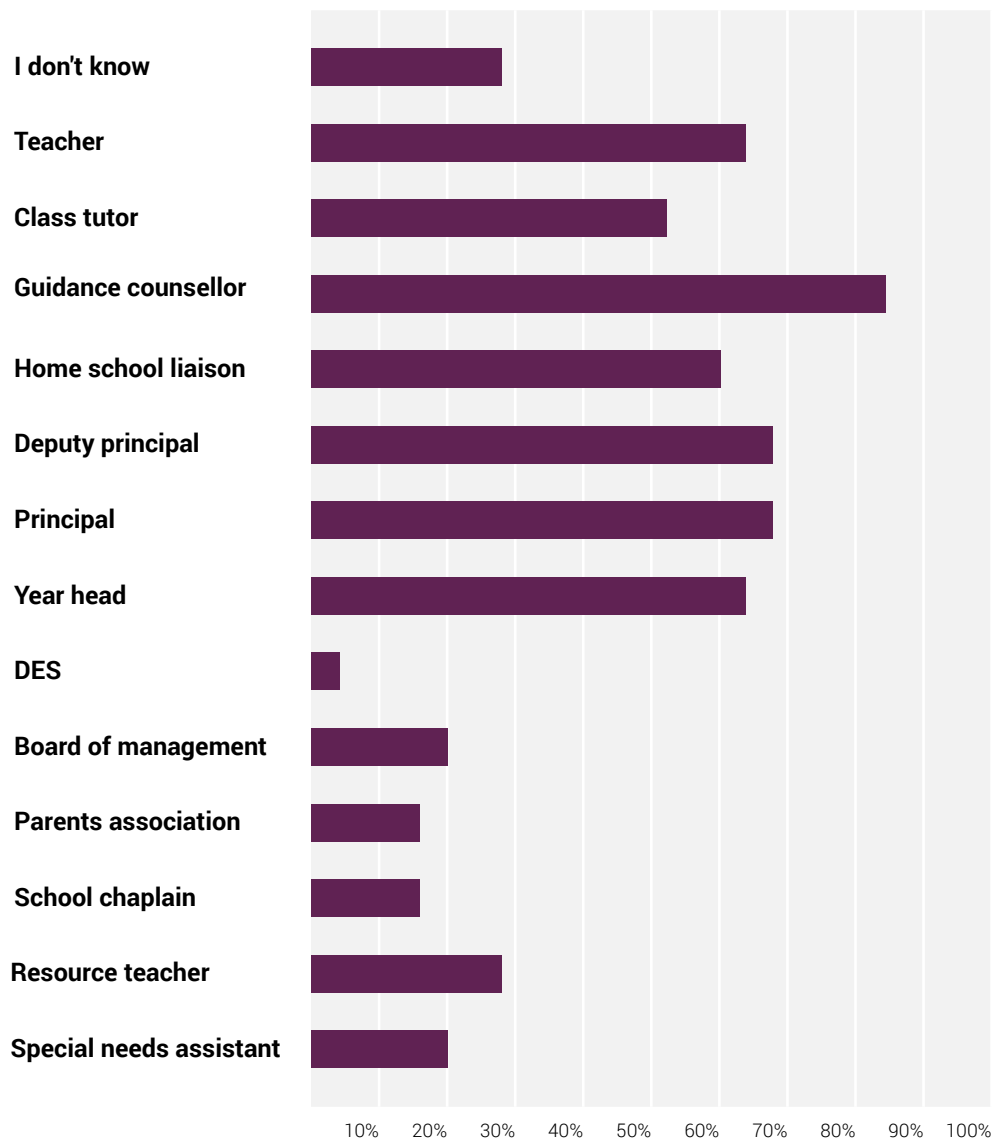
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Fig. 5.4: *Q 7 - Views on stakeholder involvement in a whole school approach to guidance counselling.*

Question 8, a qualitative question, sought respondent's views on their own specific role within a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. Among the total responses (51%; n=19), 84% (n=16) of them indicated they had a role, while 16% (n=3) indicated they saw no role for themselves. In some cases respondents indicated having a non-specific role such as an *"active member of staff"* that involved *"providing support to students"*. Four respondents specifically indicated *"leadership"* roles as either a Year Head or form teacher which involved interactions with other members of staff through meetings. Three others viewed their role as a referral one where concerns or problems are brought to the Guidance Counsellor by them as required. One respondent suggested that they may also *"…make a judgement call and bypass the Guidance Counsellor [and] go direct to principal"*. Four other respondents indicated roles related to supporting future aspirations to go to college or career planning among the students.

Question 9 asked respondents to indicate whether there is a published School Guidance Plan in the case school. *Figure 5.5* shows that from the total responses (68%; n=25), 12% (n=3) indicated that there is a Plan, while 88% (n=22) did not know.
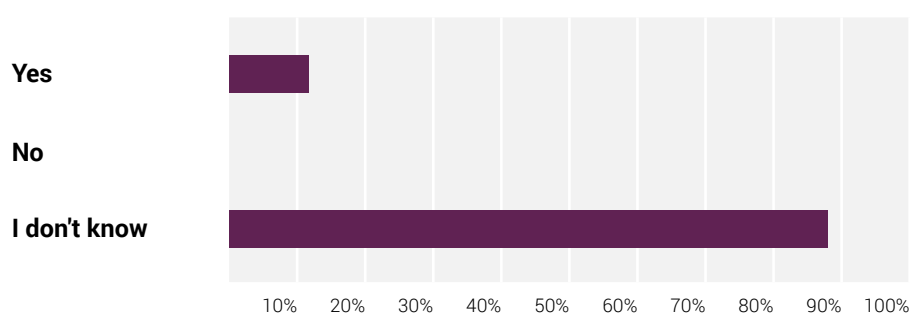
Fig. 5.5: *Q 9 – Awareness of School Guidance Plan.*

In terms of respondent's views on who should be involved in the drawing up of the School Guidance Plan (Question 10, *Fig. 5.6*) of the total response rate (68%, n=25), the results indicate that the Guidance Counsellor and the Principal were the most frequently identified stakeholders (76%; n=19). This is followed by Year Heads (72%; n=18) while the Deputy Principal was also identified by many respondents (68%; n=17). Other stakeholders such as the Home School Liaison Officer (44%; n=11), teachers (40%; n=11) and School Completion Officer (32%; n=8) were less often identified. The DES was referred to by 12% (n=3) of respondents. A number of respondents indicated they did not know (20%; n=5), whilst 8% (n=2) selected other, specifying the "*care team*" and *"whole school"* respectively

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Fig. 5.6: *Q 10 - Stakeholders who should be involved in developing School Guidance Plan.*

5.2.3 FUNCTION AND ACTIVITIES OF SCHOOL GUIDANCE SERVICE

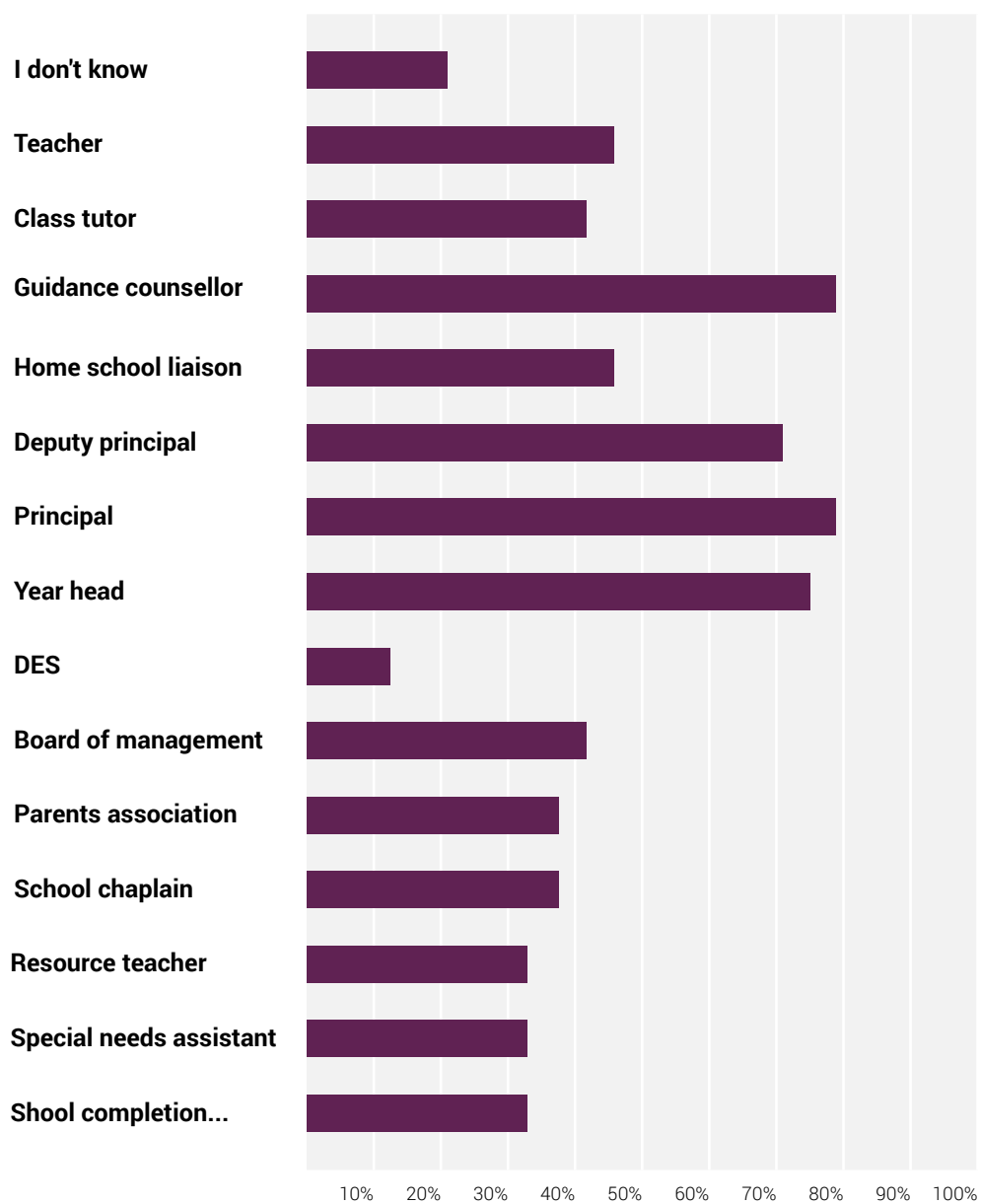Section three of the survey comprised questions 11 to 17 and commenced with three qualitative questions that sought to explore respondents perceptions regarding what guidance counselling is and its delivery in the case school. Question 11, which had a response rate of 57% (n=21), asked respondents to state their understanding of the term 'guidance counselling' and generated a broad range of responses that addressed the three domains of guidance counselling, namely personal and social, educational and career. Certain terms were regularly used such as giving "*help*" to "*guide students*", or "*advice and information*" to "*guide and counsel*" students. Strong emphasis was placed on the career and personal domains of guidance counselling by a significant number of respondents. Some respondents (48%; n=10) indicated "*personal counselling*", "*personal support*" and "*helping and guiding students who have personal difficulties*" as important. By contrast, while aspects of educational guidance were referenced, it was not indicated with the same frequency as the personal counselling domain. A number of respondents (38%; n=8) particularly mentioned "*career guidance*" or "*further education/ progression after secondary school*" as being important aspects of the role of a Guidance Counsellor.

The data for Questions 12 and 13 show some divergences in respondent's views on the delivery of guidance counselling with reference to student needs. Overall, responses showed a high level of emphasis being placed on both the personal and career guidance domains of guidance counselling in the case school. Question 12, which had a response rate of 51% (n=19), referred to the circumstances that might lead to a student needing guidance counselling in the case school. A strong emphasis was placed on personal problems or stressors, for example 74% (n=14) of responses referenced personal troubles or emotional issues. One respondent suggested "*stress, home problems, school problems, friends*", another referred to "*trauma, stress, confusion, bereavement,..*", while another suggested "*death in the family, not coping with school life, being bullied*". Issues such as "*anxiety*" or "*low self-esteem*" were also stated. Career guidance related issues were also referenced by nine of the respondents, namely help with "*CAO choices*" or "*career direction*". Finally, a small number of respondents also referenced educational guidance such as "*subject choices*" or "*issues in the classroom*".

Question 13, with a response rate of 49% (n=18), sought views on the function of the school guidance service. The responses tended to be far more general than those of Question 12, such as "*to provide help and assistance to students so as to ensure they are in a safe caring environment*" or "*to help a child through their school years*". There was an emphasis on providing "*advice*" and "*information*", and "*listening to students*". One respondent stated "*To inform students on careers, college courses, listen to students*", while another suggested "*giving advice, listening to student's worries or complaints*". One interesting aspect of the responses was a reference by some respondents to supporting school staff or students and families; "*to listen, offer advice and advise teachers/parents*", while another suggested "*To provide support, advice and intervention on behalf of students and families*".

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The emphasis placed on personal guidance counselling referred to in the two previous questions was also evident in the data from Questions 14 and 15 on the subject of the three domains of guidance counselling. Question 14, which had a response rate of 68% (n=22), firstly asked whether one aspect of guidance counselling was more important than the other. Results show that 68% of respondents (n=15) perceived one aspect was more important than others. The respondents then ranked the three domains of guidance counselling according to importance (*see Figure 5.7*). It generated a response rate of 41% (n=15), with 85% (n=12) ranking personal guidance as the most important, 73% (n=11) ranking educational guidance as second most important and 73% (n=11) ranking vocational guidance as third in importance.
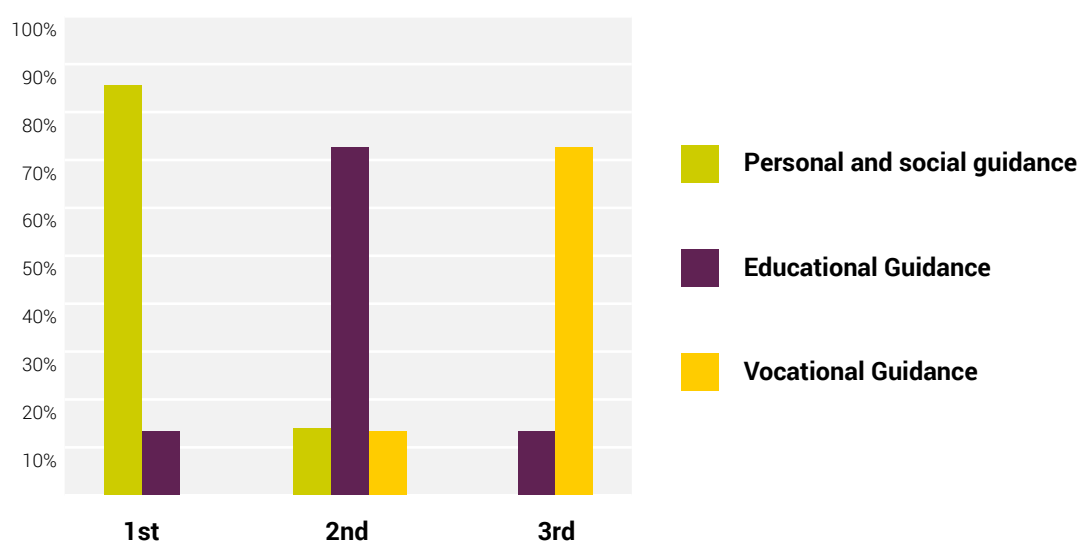
Fig. 5.7: *Q 14 - Stakeholders who should be involved in developing School Guidance Plan.*

Question 15, asked respondents to rank the same three domains of guidance counselling according to the priority they perceive that they are being given in the case school (see *Fig. 5.8*). With a response rate of 57% (n=21), 80% (n=16) of respondents ranked personal guidance as the most important, followed by 15% (n=3) educational guidance and 5% (n=1) vocational guidance. By comparison, 65% of respondents (n=13) ranked educational guidance as second most important, 20% (n=4) ranked it as most important, while 15% (n=3) ranked it as least important. Finally, 75% (n=15) of participants ranked vocational guidance as least important, 20% (n=4) ranked it as second most important, while only 5% of respondents (n=1) ranked it as receiving most importance from the school's guidance service.
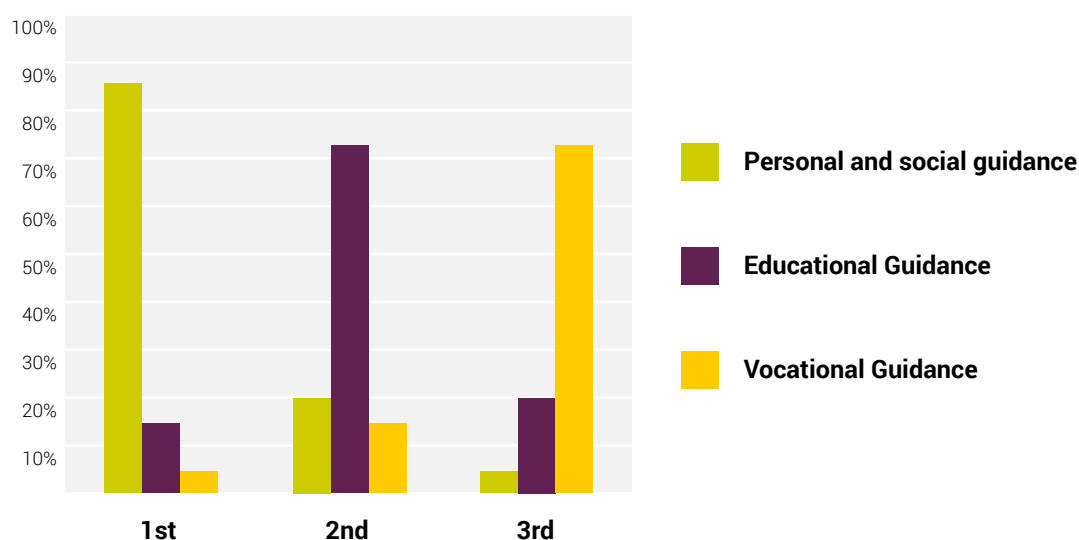
Fig. 5.8: *Q 15 - Priority given to the three domains of guidance by guidance service.*

Questions 16 and 17 asked respondents to indicate the guidance activities being carried out with both Junior and Senior Cycle students by the guidance service. The data from Question 16, with a response rate of 59% (n=22), indicates that 77% (n=17) of respondents viewed *counselling* as the main activity with Junior Cycle students (*see Fig. 5.9*). This is followed equally by both *personal and social guidance* and *advice* (59%; n = 13), dealing with *career transitions* (50%; n=11) and *educational development* was stated by 36% (n=8). To a lesser extent *information provision* (32%; n=7) and *assessment* (27%; n=6) were indicated. Finally, one respondent specified that he/she did not "*know the main activities*".
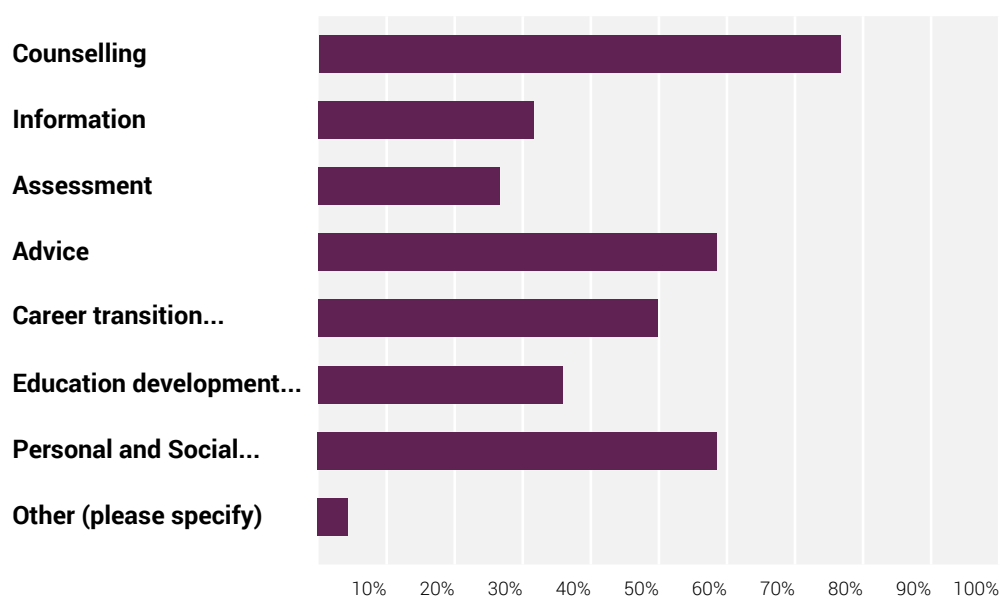
Fig. 5.9: *Q 16 - Main guidance activities with Junior Cycle students*

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The data from Question 17 on Senior Cycle activities had a response rate of 59% (n=22) (*see Fig. 5.10*). The data indicates increased provision in *counselling* and *information provision* (91%; n=20) to this cohort of students. This is followed by *career transitions* (86%; n=19), *educational development* (68%; (n=15), *advice* (64%; n=14), *personal and social guidance* (50%; n=11) and *assessment* (32%; n=7).
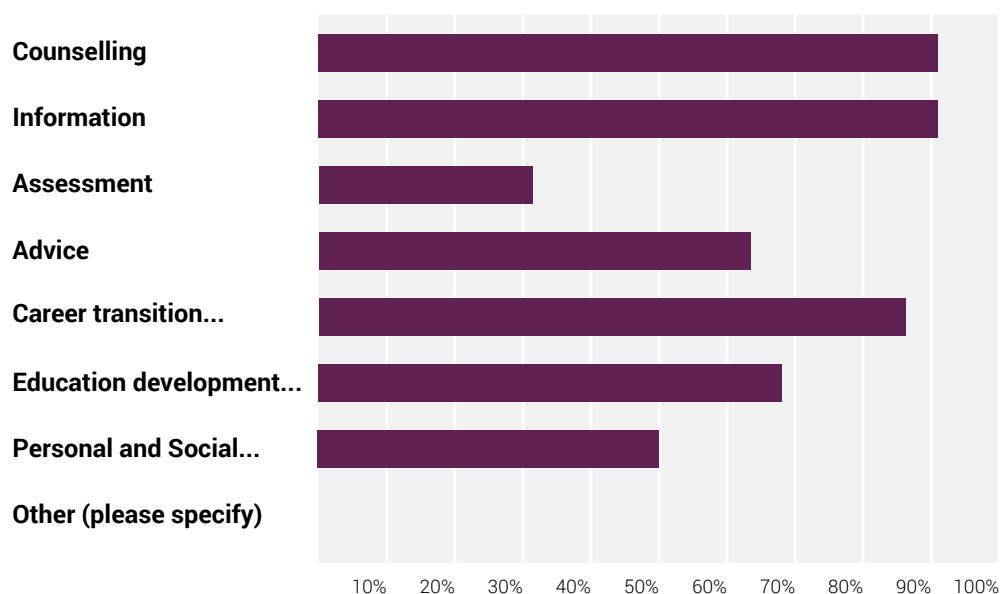
Fig. 5.10: *Q 17 - Main guidance activities with Senior Cycle students*

5.2.4. PROVISION OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN CASE SCHOOL SINCE BUDGET 2012

The fourth section of the survey comprised questions 18 to 27 and related to respondents perceptions of the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the case school since the Budget 2012 re-allocation. Question 18 gathered information on notable changes in the provision of guidance counselling in the school with a response rate of 59% (n=22). In total, 68% (n=25) were "*unsure*" of any changes, whilst 18% (n=4) indicated that they had not seen any changes, and 14% (n=3) had noted changes (*see Fig. 5.11*).
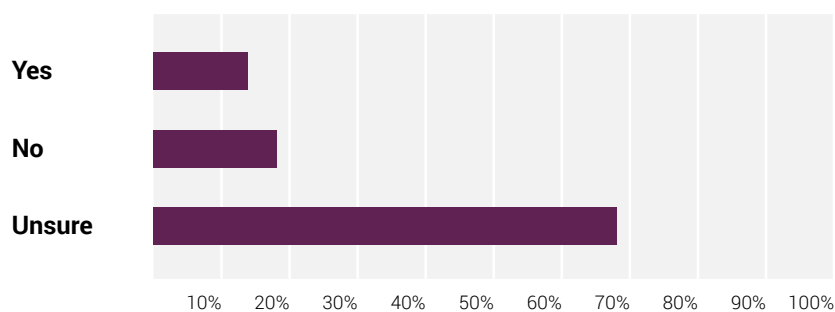
Fig. 5.11: *Q 18 – Changes to guidance counselling provision since Budget 2012.*

There were four qualitative comments to Question 18. One new teacher in the school did not know if there had been any changes. Two respondents identified a lack of time and resources as the main challenge to the delivery of guidance counselling, with one proposing that "*the role of the Guidance Counsellor has become much more demanding in relation to time*". Another respondent suggested an additional Guidance Counsellor is required to meet the needs of the large student group in the school.

The issue of time and resources also emerged in Questions 19 and 20. Question 19 had a response rate of 59% (n=22) and asked staff about the key challenges in providing a guidance counselling service in the case school. The vast majority of responses indicated that a lack of "*time*", "*resources*" or insufficient numbers of guidance counsellors in the school were a significant barrier. Some other respondents referred to the extensive role of the Guidance Counsellor which may impact on the achievement of the range of guidance activities with a large cohort of students.

Question 20 had a response rate of 59% (n=22) with the majority of respondents stating that the school did not have sufficient resources for appropriate guidance counselling provision (*see Fig. 5.12*).
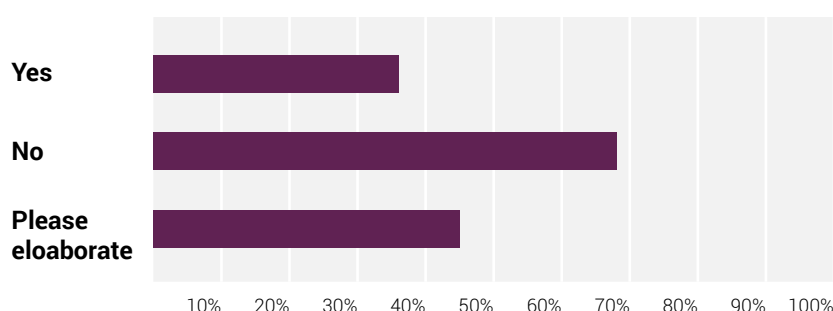
Fig. 5.12: *Q 20 – Level of resources for guidance counselling provision in school*

Ten respondents provided further comments to Question 20. There were a number of very positive comments regarding guidance provision in the case school. For example, one respondent commented "*we have a full time Guidance Counsellor which is invaluable. It means when there is an issue you can go straight to his office and support is there immediately*". The majority indicated that there were insufficient resources and too large a student caseload for one Guidance Counsellor in the case school. One respondent stated that, in general, "*guidance counsellors should undergo personal counselling and have the necessary skillset…to listen empathically to the students*".

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Question 21 asked respondents about the current communication processes between the school guidance service and school staff which achieved a response rate of 58% (n=22) (*see Fig. 5.13*). Overall, 31% (n=7) of respondents rated it as good, 22% (n=5) equally rated it as excellent and fair, 18% (n=4) rating it as average, while 5% (n=1) rated it as poor.

Respondent rating of communication
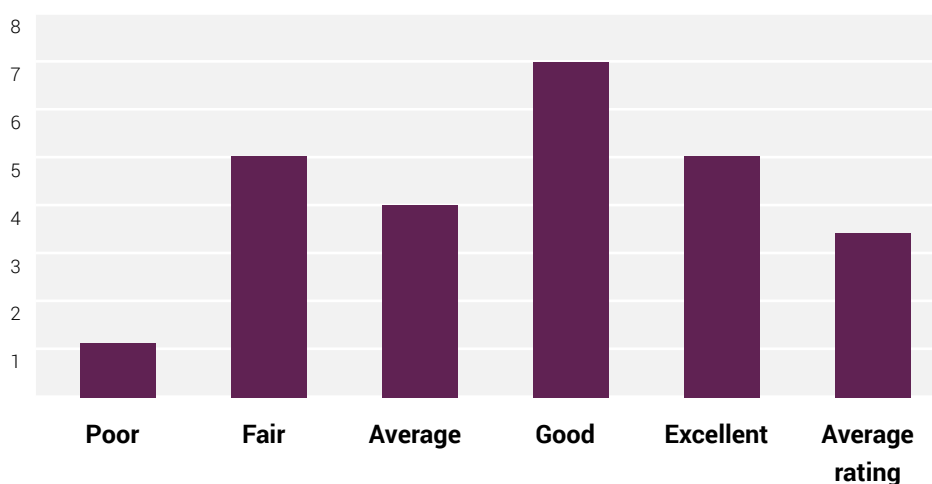
Fig. 5.13: *Q 21 - Communication processes between the school guidance service and school staff*

Question 22 asked respondents about the level of collaboration between the school guidance service and school staff, with a response rate of 59% (n=22) (*see Fig. 5.14*). Overall, 27% (n=6) of respondents rated it equally as excellent, good and average, and 18% (n=4) rated it as fair. No respondents indicated a poor rating. This shows significant spread in the ratings of the guidance service for collaboration across the respondents.

Respondent rating of collaboration
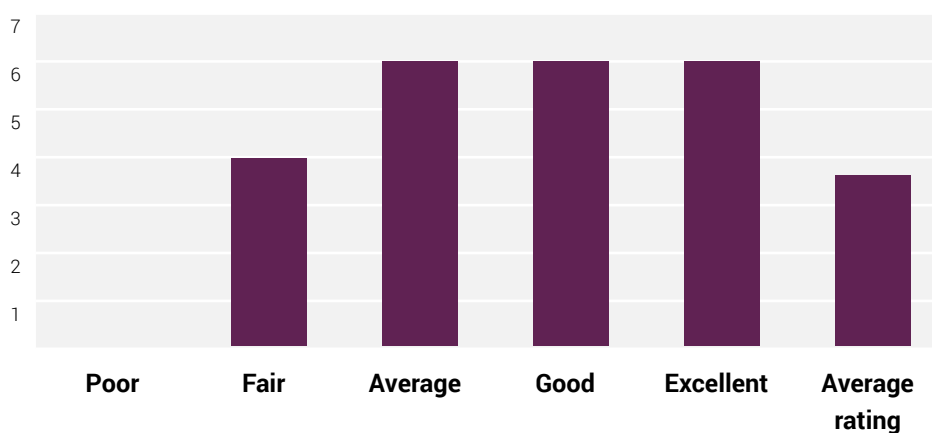
Fig. 5.14: *Q 22 - Collaboration between the school guidance service and school staff*

Question 23, which had a response rate of 59% (n=22), asked respondents how frequently they refer students to the school guidance service (*see Fig. 5.15*). Overall, 50% (n=11) refer occasionally, 27% (n=6) rarely, 18% (n=4) frequently and 4% (n=1) never. No respondent indicated very frequently referring students to the guidance service.

Respondent frequency of referral
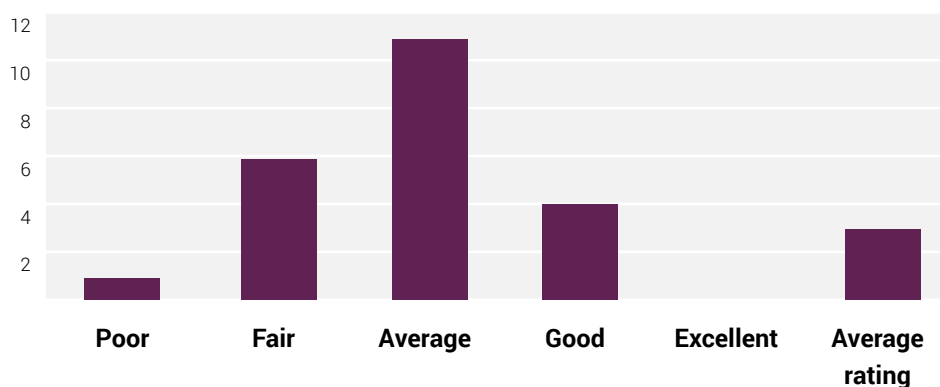
Fig. 5.15: *Q 23 - Frequency of staff referral of students to the school guidance service*

Regarding referral guidelines for staff to refer students to the guidance service, the data from Question 24, with a response rate of 59% (n=22), shows that 77% (n =17) of respondents stated there are clear guidelines, and 18 % (n = 5) stated there are none, (*see Fig. 5.16*).
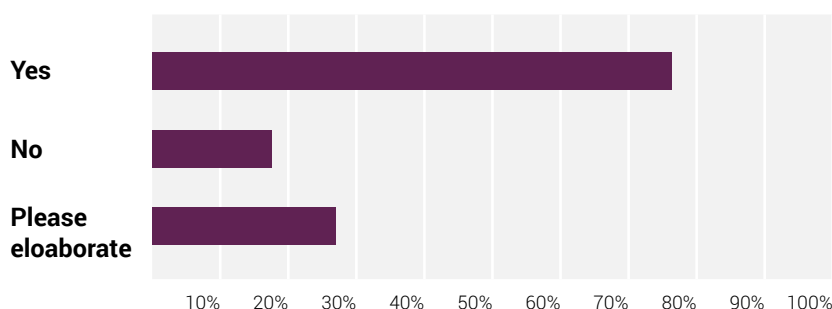
Fig. 5.16: *Q 24 – Clear referral guidelines for school staff to guidance service*

Six respondents to Question 24 elaborated further. The majority of comments confirmed that there are clear referral guidelines in place within the school. One respondent had received training "*for dealing with students at risk*". Two others referred to different referral procedures to the guidance service, including "*speaking directly to the Career Guidance Counsellor*" or using "*an e-referral*" or paper referral form to notify the Guidance Counsellor regarding a student they were concerned about. Two respondents also indicated they were unaware of any referral procedures or guidelines.

The final three questions in the survey were qualitative ones. Question 25 gathered information on the merits of the school guidance service, with a response rate of 49% (n=18). A range emerged including the existence of a guidance service being a strength in itself. Three respondents noted the strength of the service related to the Guidance Counsellor who is a "*very good Guidance Counsellor*", and is "*very competent*" and provides a "*strong lead*" in the guidance service. Other respondents also referenced the importance of the "*care team*" in supporting the guidance service within the school. The school management was also highlighted by some respondents as being instrumental in "*supporting*" the guidance service within the school and in "*ensuring there was no impact on guidance services from the re-allocation*" in 2012. Others referenced the good communication between all of these different aspects of the guidance service and the observed levels of collaboration within the school as a strong element. The Whole School Guidance Programme was identified by two respondents as being a significant strength of the guidance service, while others referenced elements of the personal guidance aspect of provision that gave students "*someone to talk to*" while also protecting their "*privacy*".

Question 26 sought to identify areas for enhancement for the school guidance service. It had a response rate of 41% (n=15) and responses echoed a number of issues that had emerged in the earlier part of the survey in relation to time, resources and an extended workload. Some respondents identified the need for "*more guidance hours*" or "*another Guidance Counsellor*". Others alluded to the provision of additional time for personal guidance and one-to-one contact with students for "*social and personal counselling*". A number of respondents also made reference to clarifying referral procedures within the school and ensuring they are followed by all staff. Improvements to communication and the sharing of information between the guidance service and staff were also referenced. Two respondents also suggested that training or support to staff on how to manage "*at risk*" students would be beneficial for staff.

The final question in the survey, Question 27, asked respondents for further comments in general resulting in two responses, one of which merely indicated that the respondent had no further comment. The other suggested that the "*Guidance Counsellor is overworked and more support needs to be provided*" and suggested that communication between the guidance service and other staff also could be improved.

This concludes the findings from the online survey to school staff. The findings indicate that, in general, most respondents perceive there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school and it involves a number of key stakeholders. Respondents had differing understandings of what a whole school approach constitutes with some of them highlighting issues regarding roles and responsibilities within the school and the referral processes amongst the school staff and guidance service. Respondents also differed in their understandings of guidance counselling and the majority of them were unaware of the existence of a School Guidance Plan. The respondents did highlight areas of merit regarding whole school guidance counselling provision especially with regard to personal and social guidance and career guidance. A lack of resources was identified as a key challenge by some respondents, but this was not necessarily attributed to the re-allocation of guidance counselling resources within the school since Budget 2012.

5.3 DATA SOURCE 2: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

This section will present the findings from the semi-structured interviews with school management, guidance counsellor and past students. The findings will be presented in two separate sections to reflect the difference between the two distinct cohorts of participants.

5.3.1 INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR

The findings from the semi-structured interviews with the school management and the school's Guidance Counsellor will be presented through two main themes that emerged: a whole school approach to guidance counselling and the role and responsibilities of the Guidance Counsellor within a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

5.3.1.1 WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

This initial theme relates to how a whole school approach to guidance counselling is interpreted and enacted within the case school. There are three sub-themes within this main theme: *understanding of a whole school approach to guidance counselling*, *the role of school management* in guidance counselling provision within a whole school approach and *whole school structures* that support the development and provision of a whole school approach within the case school.

Concerning the first sub-theme there was consensus amongst the three interviewees that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. There were some slight divergences between the Guidance Counsellor and the school management on the issue. According to the Guidance Counsellor the whole school approach to guidance counselling within the school "…*is broken into two main areas"*, one of which is vocational guidance while *"the other side of guidance, mental health, wellbeing in school"* is also a priority for the guidance service. The delivery of these two aspects of guidance by the school's guidance service is *"kind of, pretty much split down the middle in this school at the minute"*. However, the Guidance Counsellor reported that the *"vocational part of it is the easier part"* because *"you can tick that box more easily"* while the *"the whole student wellbeing"* element of guidance provision is *"more complicated, more time consuming and, you know, I would like more time for it"*.

In the interview with school management a whole school approach to guidance counselling was viewed as being an important element of the school community. The Deputy Principal stated that guidance counselling is "*actually the foundation and the bedrock of the school"* and "*everything that we do in the school kind of comes from that"*. The guidance service is "*cushioned by the whole school approach"* and "*…guidance [counselling] is at the centre of that"* (Deputy Principal). Importantly, both the Guidance Counsellor and school management articulated that there has been significant change in the delivery of guidance counselling in the last number of years. Prior to the introduction of a whole school approach to guidance counselling some years ago, the Deputy Principal relayed that the former Guidance Counsellor was seen as has having a *"minimal role"* in matters directly outside of the guidance service and was *"…very much isolated from the outside"*. The Principal described the introduction of a whole school approach to guidance as an important development in the way the school is organised and run, placing particular emphasis on a the advancement of a more inclusive and transparent approach to

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the management of the school. Therefore, *"…no decision of any kind is taken at management level without the Guidance Counsellor and special needs coordinator"* (Principal), and *"the Guidance Counsellor is very much there"* (Deputy Principal).

According to the Principal a whole school approach to guidance counselling is a central element of the "*culture of the school"*.

> For me a whole school approach to guidance is a rigorous accountability of the organisation. And through putting in clear structures, that are management structures and also by creating a space for each individual teacher to really bring that back down into the classroom. (Principal)

The emphasis on accountability and *"self-evaluation"* allows for teachers to be "*clear about what they are looking for and what they're doing"* (Deputy Principal). It is focussed on supporting teachers to *"understand* [that] *the relationships within their classrooms are key to the success of the students in front of them"* (Deputy Principal). There is greater "*focus is on the teaching and learning*" and students *"wellbeing and motivation"* and their "*academic performance*" (Principal). It is drawn from the Principal's view that "*…what you call the counselling and the guidance…They're so interlinked*". According to the Principal *"…that focus on teaching and learning and then the realisation that when that's working right, that actually a lot of the issues that were arising are no longer there"*.

However, the Guidance Counsellor recognised that this may have an impact on the role of teachers within the school as some aspects of student wellbeing "*wasn't in their remit previously*" and the introduction of a whole school approach was *"about education for staff too"* (Guidance Counsellor). While some staff members "*are getting there*" others have not fully "*bought into these changes*" (Guidance Counsellor). The Principal also referred to the importance of planning for the introduction of a whole school approach *"through huge amount of CPD"* for teaching staff to support the evolving *"culture of the school".* The inclusion of a whole school approach to guidance counselling is "*…something that transforms the culture of a school, it's the most effective thing I think*" (Principal).

The second sub-theme elucidates the very important role of school management within a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. Both members of the management team reported that they were very supportive of and favourable toward the implementation of a whole school approach to guidance counselling. The Principal did not think that "*anything will happen really effectively if it isn't driven and embraced by the principal and management of the school*" and "*personally …I wouldn't think you could have a whole school approach unless the Principal drives it*". According to the Deputy Principal "*… let's put it this way, if the Principal has the vision - the guidance is the add on…*". The importance of management support was recognised by the Guidance Counsellor who felt "*lucky"* to be *"in a school where they see the importance of the Guidance Counsellor and the health and wellbeing of the students".* A number of very concrete outcomes that impact on the ability of the Guidance Counsellor to implement a whole school approach to guidance counselling were stated. For example, the Guidance Counsellor has maintained an allocation of "*the 22 hours to do guidance in the school*" and is allowed a high level

of autonomy to implement a range of *"new initiatives that came knocking on my door… and they were very supportive of that"* (Guidance Counsellor). The Guidance Counsellor stated that school management would regularly "*jump in behind*" initiatives and often *"comes to the meeting with me"* to unveil the initiatives to staff.

Furthermore, the Principal and Deputy Principal are closely involved in the whole school approach as the Guidance Counsellor is just *"generally that one person"* and *"no matter how hard they work they can't they can't do all that needs to happen"* and "*it needs to be the Principal who actually turns around and says d'you know what, this is our work*" (Principal). In terms of the development of a whole school culture and influencing the reactions of other school staff to a whole school approach to guidance counselling:

> You have to set the tone….the very nature of schools and the fact that you know teachers are so isolated and so … it's opening up those classrooms. So it's at every single level as well. Like if you don't have a Principal and Deputy Principal really in full support of it, you're in trouble. (Principal)

The Principal referred to previous experiences in the school where problems *"were arising from the HR issues"* and the school students saw guidance as being *"about guidance in the sense of the pastoral care*". However, in hindsight, the Principal felt that often the complications were such that "*there was a lot of anger of kind of melt downs … where really the teacher was really the flashpoint."* In this context, it was not seen as being within the remit of the Guidance Counsellor to change the way other teachers, and thus the school, was organised and the curriculum was delivered. The Deputy Principal identified "*this is our work*" and it "*required a lot of structural changes, systems changes in the schools … to the point where it's at now*". One example was "*bringing in the mixed ability classes and that kind of thing that was the first step really to diffusing all of the flashpoints*" (Deputy Principal). Another related to the making of *"science as a core subject and a language as a core subject in two or three years ago. Three years ago"* (Principal). While, in some cases management had to deal with levels of resistance amongst some staff the Principal felt they needed to put programmes in place that they believed would be beneficial to students.

The school management also play a key role in the allocation of resources to support a whole school approach to guidance counselling. With regard to the Budget 2012 re-allocation the Principal suggested that "*what the department [DES] did was they gave to Principals the power to allocate …these are the management decisions".* However, due to the DEIS status of the case school, the allocation of 22 hours for guidance counselling was preserved which is still heavily influenced by the level of support for the guidance service by school management. According to the Principal in the past many principals had viewed a school's allocation "*as an allocation of teachers…and it's for teaching classes*" and "*…if you have a teacher even though they are a Guidance Counsellor*" they may be reallocated to teaching classes. This approach was adopted by principals due in many cases to a poor understanding of "*…the connection between say the special needs and the counselling aspects of learning…*" (Principal). This led to principals not seeing the value of a whole school approach to guidance counselling but rather seeing guidance as being part of an allocation of teaching hours in the classroom and "*breaking up this magnificent,*

first of all body of knowledge, and secondly, people to support the student" (Principal) . With the re-allocation of guidance counselling, many schools where principals adopted this class grouping approach to guidance allocation experienced a "*…complete…decimation of anything that was there*" for guidance provision (Principal). In contrast, the Principal suggested that "*..if you look at the schools where that didn't happen*" following the 2012 re-allocation "*it is down to the Principal being informed and knowing that you absolutely have to have those services there*".

Nonetheless, in order to provide an inclusive whole school approach to guidance counselling within the case school structures need to be in place to deliver guidance across the curriculum. As there is only one Guidance Counsellor, a number of initiatives have been introduced within the school that complement and augment guidance provision. They often involve the Guidance Counsellor and school management working in collaboration with other members of staff. Two specific initiatives which have been incorporated in recent years are the Whole School Guidance Programme and the SST structure. Both of these initiatives address some of the key goals of a whole school approach to guidance counselling provision in the case school.

The Whole School Guidance Programme has also been introduced within the school in recent years. This cross-curricular programme provides a structure for supporting post primary schools to inspire students' career aspirations and the development of their leadership skills. According to the Principal, the programme has "*just brought the school to a different level*" and "*it actually connects people together. It connects teachers, it connects groups, it connects you know the year heads and it connects with the team*". As stated by the Principal the Whole School Guidance Programme is similar to the DEIS programme in that it provides a set of quality measurement criteria to support the development of the whole school. However, while DEIS is "*complicated*" in its approach, the Whole School Guidance Programme is very "*clear, neutral, factual language with no judgement in it*" and a "*rubric*" of particular "*practices*" (Principal) are specified for schools to adhere to. The value of a clear whole school structure was also echoed by the Guidance Counsellor who believes a "*set of criteria that you have to aim for*" has supported the school to have "*something for every student in the school. We do something around college or goal setting so, we have college awareness week…*". According to the Deputy Principal the programme facilitates students in developing "*this notion of tapping into your own strengths and abilities*", thus further supporting their engagement with school. The Deputy Principal also suggested that Whole School Guidance Programme aligns well with student mentoring and wellbeing programmes within the school.

The Whole School Guidance Programme is also viewed by the Principal and the Deputy Principal as having an impact on the student's school experience across a number of domains. It also impacts on the staff within the school, "*building links between people*" and "*culture in the school of openness and support*" (Principal). One noteworthy area the programme has had a significant impact is how "*bullying*" is managed within the school which is now more "*self-regulated with the kids*" (Principal) and has reduced the severity of bullying related issues that the Guidance Counsellor needs to be involved in. The Deputy Principal also feels the emphasis on "*understanding what you're learning style is*" has supported students in their subject choices as the Whole School Guidance Programme supports them to have "*a better sense of that.*" Overall, as stated by the Principal, the Whole School Guidance Programme supports the guidance service, especially in providing guidance to the Junior Cycle student cohorts. The Guidance

Counsellor "*won't have to be so worried about…the guidance aspect of the Junior Cycle or say the careers stuff*" (Principal) because the Whole School Guidance Programme is addressing many of these aspects of guidance with these students through a whole school approach.

Finally, the introduction of the SST structure within the last two years was described by the Deputy Principal as one of "*…the most recent changes where …we've developed a whole school approach*". Indeed, the school has recently altered its timetable so that all of the Year Heads can be present at the same SST meeting. From the perspective of the Guidance Counsellor the introduction of the whole school SST structure aligns closely with aspects of the Guidance Counsellor's role and supports the "*mental health or wellbeing of the students*". Furthermore, the guidance counsellor spends "*more time now meeting with year heads, home school liaison, school completion, principals*" which has "*cleared up a lot*" of the workload and communication challenges that were previously experienced. The SST is very effective as it is "*…bringing all those different resources together…to begin to look for solutions*" (Deputy Principal). Importantly, SST meetings have a "*tight structure*" that allow scope for different staff to work together, which the Guidance Counsellor believes is a "*definite improvement*". Additionally students are accounted for or given attention so that the Guidance Counsellor is "*…not as worried about students falling between the cracks….*":

> We are all sitting there and you have a job to do now or you have to meet this person and it is easier to check in on how students are doing and that kind of thing. That is one area that has improved. (Guidance Counsellor)

The introduction of the SST structure is also consistent with the Principal's desire for a more inclusive, transparent and accountable culture in the school. According to the Principal, it provides "*mutual accountability*" and engagement from a range of staff within the school with regard to student support decisions and the actions or interventions in the past regarding the particular student into the future.

5.3.1.2 ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR WITHIN A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

The second major theme to emerge in the interviews was the role and responsibilities of the Guidance Counsellor within a whole school approach to guidance counselling. There are four sub-themes within this overarching theme: workload of the Guidance Counsellor, divergence in guidance counselling between Junior and Senior Cycle, student progression following the Leaving Certificate, and cross curricular initiatives.

Concerning the first sub-theme the case school has undergone a significant growth in student numbers in recent years leading to an increase in the caseload of the guidance service. As there is only one fulltime guidance counsellor on staff, the role is both complex and very busy:

> So, I suppose … you are just busy here. You come here early in the morning and you're seeing people, you're seeing people through lunch. You're …it is full on here and you don't know what is going to happen…. It could be for six sessions, it could be for one session. (Guidance Counsellor)

The Guidance Counsellor reported seeing "*anything up to half the student population in my office for one reason or another*" which comprises a caseload of roughly 300 students. This high workload was recognised by the management "*if you're one person trying to make an impact*" on such a high caseload of students "*it's just not going to happen…*" (Principal). Management also recognised the complexity of the linking and coordination aspects of the Guidance Counsellor's role within a whole school approach. "*The Guidance Counsellor has an awful lot of work to do … just in selecting what needs to be [done]*" (Deputy Principal), and is seen as being "*everywhere*" (Principal). Management also emphasised the leadership shown by the Guidance Counsellor who "*would be very much involved in the development of the whole school approach*" (Principal). According to the Principal, the Guidance Counsellor "*creates opportunities for all of the kids by linking in with all the organisations*" and thus developing a very good understanding of what is "*appropriate*" for each particular year.

In contrast, prior to the introduction of a whole school approach the former Guidance Counsellor was in a more isolated position and provision was unbalanced as it involved "*a lot more time spent on student wellbeing*" (Guidance Counsellor), and one to one personal counselling to the detriment of "*the Junior Cycle classes*" who lost out on "*getting as much guidance around careers*" (Principal). Nonetheless, in spite of the introduction of a whole school which has allowed more space and time for the Guidance Counsellor to address other aspects of the role, "*the counselling is one area that is go go go all the time*" (Guidance Counsellor). While the school's DEIS status has supported the maintenance of the guidance allocation, the personal counselling domain "*is the one area that you sense the cuts have come in, it is the one area that loses out because of time…*" (Guidance Counsellor). This level of support now involves brief solution focussed counselling and referral onwards to appropriate supports by the guidance counsellor. Consequently:

> …you feel that you are not seeing your students enough. Like before you would do the full six sessions with them but now you are trying to squeeze it in and it is not a full counselling session so there isn't that you know…setting the right space. (Guidance Counsellor)

This theme of a lack of time for personal guidance provision was also evident in the career guidance provision. When discussing the one to one career interview element of vocational guidance counselling, which should ideally be conducted with fifth year students, the guidance counsellor admitted that "*timewise, that mightn't always happen because that takes a chunk of time*" due to the "*…one man show*" nature of the guidance service "*time is a problem*" (Guidance Counsellor). Other resources on occasion, such as a trainee guidance counsellor on practice placement, supplement the resources of the guidance service and aid in addressing these particularly pressurised areas of provision. Other areas of guidance counselling appear to be given a greater allocation of time within a class guidance structure. The Guidance Counsellor has "*class time with the TY students*" and does "*careers with the TYS, with the LCAs, and the 6th years*". Additionally, the Guidance Counsellor also noted that "*…a lot of careers stuff is going on in the background*" involving all year groups at some level.

With regards to the second sub-theme, the provision of guidance counselling appears to differ from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle within the case school. The DES Inspection report of guidance provision had previously noted that the school service was "*too top heavy, it is too 5th year 6th*"

year heavy" (Guidance Counsellor). The Principal viewed it as "*a different role*" for the Guidance Counsellor in that "*…in the Junior Cycle the Guidance Counsellor is kind of going to them and in the Senior Cycle they're coming to the [Guidance Counsellor]…*". Nonetheless, the Guidance Counsellor did not necessarily concur with this perspective reporting having "*something about college*" for all student groups within the school. Furthermore, particular emphasis placed on reaching out to second year students as they have been identified as vulnerable to "*losing interests… and dropping subjects*" (Guidance Counsellor). However, the Guidance Counsellor acknowledged not having class contact time with Junior Cycle students:

> I think that is very important and I think that is the biggest difference really. I have contact time with them in the Senior Cycle whereas I rely on the kindness of other teachers in some ways for the Junior Cycle. (Guidance Counsellor)

The Guidance Counsellor described the role of working with Junior Cycle students as primarily a coordination one as "*I just wouldn't have the physical time for all those students … so its buy in from staff*". Guidance provision to Junior Cycle students, therefore, requires collaboration with other members of the teaching staff through initiatives such as the Whole School Guidance Programme to meet the guidance objectives:

> Say, computers, our IT department are relied on to do a little bit of college course investigation as part of their course. The English department also play their part for the first year thing [I mentioned earlier]. Then working as a bigger team to try and get bigger things organised. (Guidance Counsellor)

While such initiatives are an important aspect of a whole school approach to guidance counselling provision and involve working collaboratively with other members of the school staff, they do not involve students working directly with the Guidance Counsellor. In addition, these initiatives are supplementary to the Guidance Counsellor's workload and mean time away from working directly with students. According to the Guidance Counsellor it took time to "*get it up and running*" and the running of the initiative does "*take up time.*"

In contrast, the Guidance Counsellor has timetabled classes with the Senior Cycle, i.e. TY, LCA and 6th year students which allow for clear planning of provision in a structured manner. "*Before Christmas it is CAO/UCAS*" and the Guidance Counsellor tries "*to set a deadline so that everyone has the CAO filled in before Christmas*" (Guidance Counsellor). Following that the classes "*look at the PLC courses and start looking at, you know, revision and study skills*" (Guidance Counsellor). These structured classes also allow classes address student funding information such as the SUSI system. This structured and progressive approach contrasts with the initiative based guidance provision for Junior Cycle students in the case school.

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5.3.1.3 POST LEAVING CERTIFICATE PROGRESSION

The third sub-theme that emerged in the interviews relates to the strong commitment within the school to support student progression post Leaving Certificate. This appears to be a significant priority of the school more generally, but particularly of the guidance service. The Guidance Counsellor stated levels of college progression among the student population has increased from 17% progression to "*79/75%*" in recent times. The Principal acknowledged "*college or university is maybe where you want people [students] to go…you know…you do want them in education*". However, the Principal also emphasised the importance of "*a proper training programme*" as a potential progression from school. In contrast, the Guidance Counsellor emphasised the importance of university progression:

> ..it is just a matter of just helping our students to leave this school being well informed and make the right college choices and then going on and sticking with college, getting their degrees and getting a good job. (Guidance Counsellor)

This emphasis on college awareness and progression has developed into a specific Whole School Guidance Programme in the form of classes and supports to all students. The Guidance Counsellor reported that the school provides "*something for every student*" focused on "*college or goal setting*". This was echoed by the Principal who stated that the Whole School Guidance Programme involves a range of stakeholders within and outside the school and trips to a number of universities:

> …that's where you're really talking about your whole school guidance because that's where you've had your college awareness week, you've had your … investigations, you've had every teacher talking to this student about college, you've had the input with parents, you've had them to [names university] or to another college. (Principal)

The Guidance Counsellor also referred to such trips but stressed the importance of logistical issues due to location and travel involved. While students may progress to college, "*most people ….are not going to leave [the local area] to go to college*":

> I think that every student in the school should be at least have … a couple of lessons around where they would like to be in ten years' time and how they might get there. And just even for themselves, to see themselves as future leaders. Being able to progress, having the skill set to progress. (Guidance Counsellor)

5.3.1.4 CROSS CURRICULAR INITIATIVES

The final sub-theme concerns cross-curricular initiatives as part of the Whole School Guidance Programme in the case school that support the provision of a whole school approach to guidance counselling. These initiatives are particularly important in the Junior Cycle and the Guidance Counsellor has been central to their initiation and maintenance. In the case of one, 'Friendship Week', it is the Guidance Counsellor's role to "*…run it, I make sure the lessons are all up to speed and whatever new stuff is coming in I get video links in*". Importantly, however, this initiative is delivered by form teachers and other members of staff which requires "*buy-in*" of the school staff (Guidance Counsellor). 'Friendship Week' takes place early in the school year across all student cohorts and seeks to address the personal element of guidance especially in relation to student mental health and wellbeing and addresses aspects of bullying and functions as "*our anti-bullying week*" (Guidance Counsellor). Students are encouraged to talk about relevant issues and to share their own opinions or experiences. Topics covered would range across subjects such as bullying, the role of bystanders in such bullying episodes and recognising the different forms of bullying behaviour. The students also talk about what is acceptable or unacceptable in the case school in particular;

There are also a number of initiatives that focus on the careers aspect of guidance provision in the Junior Cycle such as the 'Speed Careers' initiative for second years in September where the school invites:

> 40 different professionals from around the area came into the PE hall and student were put into groups of 3 and they had 5 minutes to bounce as many questions off these guys as they could. We had solicitors, architects, the guards, the army. You name it. (Guidance Counsellor)

The Guidance Counsellor believed this is a good way to "*get them to start thinking about careers or "what could I do?*" and also allows students to "*get a quick snapshot of that career, what subjects you need and what a day in their life is like*". A 'College Awareness Week' is delivered in collaboration with teaching staff within the school with the overall aim of increasing levels of ability and educational aspiration amongst students through developing "*college awareness, knowing the college courses in the area. Linking their hobbies to a college course*" (Guidance Counsellor). The lesson plans for 'College Awareness Week' are developed by the Guidance Counsellor in conjunction with the English Department and address such topics as leadership, planning and strategic thinking. Finally, another initiative is the dissemination of a survey to 1st year students entitled 'Do you aspire to go to College?' This initiative differs regarding the levels of staff participation as it involves teachers talking and discussing their college experiences with students. According to the Guidance Counsellor the students love to hear these personal stories and that the teachers were *"thinking about doing nursing too"*.

This concludes the findings from the interviews with the school management and the Guidance Counsellor. All three agreed that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. Of the three domains of guidance counselling, personal and career guidance were

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particularly highlighted compared to educational guidance. All three stressed the importance of support from school management for the design and delivery of a whole school approach and how the guidance service is linked with other whole school structures in addressing aspects of guidance provision. In particular, the Whole School Guidance Programme and the SST structures were identified as vital in this regard, especially for Junior Cycle students who do not receive the same levels of one to one interaction with the guidance service. The Guidance Counsellor identified a busy workload as a significant challenge in meeting all aspects of guidance counselling provision, especially with regards to Junior Cycle students. All participants stated that there are divergences in guidance counselling provision between the Junior and Senior Cycle in the case school. However, the interviewees attributed this to the differing needs of the Junior and Senior Cycle student cohorts. Finally, the provision of career learning and development opportunities for students to support their post Leaving Certificate options, and progression to third level education especially, is evident. A variety of collaborative initiatives are in place across the curriculum to ensure that the school executes a whole school approach to guidance counselling to all students.

5.3.2 INTERVIEWS WITH PAST STUDENTS

Four past students (PS) of the case school were interviewed to ascertain their experiences and perceptions of guidance counselling during their time in the school. Three main themes emerged in the findings: perceptions of a whole school approach to guidance counselling; guidance counselling across the curriculum; and domains of guidance counselling. Across these three themes there is repeated reference to a number of key stakeholders such as the Guidance Counsellor and other teaching staff. There is only a limited reference made to the role of parents or family relatives.

5.3.2.1 PERCEPTIONS OF A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

The students discussed a range of whole school phenomena that contributed towards guidance counselling provision during their time in the school. According to one student, guidance counselling had "*…a strong presence around the school"* (PS 2). One student suggested that many of the messages they heard from the Guidance Counsellor were messages also heard "*…every single day from [our] teachers*" (PS 3). All four students referred to a particular emphasis across the school on students progressing to other forms of education following the Leaving Certificate. Specifically, the past students found that the "*main focus was towards third level education*" (PS 2). According to one student, "*the main focus was put on getting the degree and the education first"* and only later would other "*possible career opportunities*" emerge (PS 1). The focus on higher education also formed "*…the main focus of the careers class [which] was all about just getting into college to begin with"* (PS 2). Less direct approaches towards promoting the idea of higher education to students were also referenced, such as the "*fame wall"* (PS 3). According to this student the Guidance Counsellor "*introduced a fame wall"* where pictures of "*all the students that went into college"* are displayed prominently near the school's entrance. This student believed that it was *"a big thing to go there and see your picture…. I really wanted to see my picture up on the wall…"* (PS 3)

According to some of the students, the emphasis on progression to higher education had an impact on the approach to preparation for the Leaving Certificate exam and the need to achieve points in order to access higher education courses through the CAO system. One student

suggested that his preparation for the Senior Cycle course "*was more for points really*" with advice being given to choose subjects that students were good at as this "*…helped to maximise*" points (PS 1). This student recalled this approach being something the Guidance Counsellor specifically suggested but that similar messages were given by other teachers in the school. Another student recalled that the Guidance Counsellor spent significant time helping them choose subjects on a one-to-one basis but this "*might not be the same for everyone*" (PS 3). The school did provide "*information evenings organised by [the] Guidance Counsellor for parents and students…where it was comprehensively covered about how to go about choosing certain subjects*" (PS 2). These information evenings provided students with a range of information regarding subject choices.

Across some of the interviews students also referred to other stakeholders who were important in supporting them in making choices during their time in the school. Teachers in the case school were helpful, particularly with regard to subject choices and course choices for the CAO process. While this was not "*really like definitive or distinctive mentoring*", many students felt it was very important (PS 4). One student had "*always been so close to my teachers [which] really helped*" with their time in the school and choice of subjects (PS 3). However, another suggested that while "*…a lot of them were approachable…not all of them*" were (PS 1). This was echoed by another student who suggested students might only approach a teacher they already had a relationship with. Often students approached teachers of subjects they had a particular interest in, such as a "*PE teacher*" (PS 2), a "*history teacher*" (PS 4), and the "*maths teacher*" (PS 1). These subject areas also aligned closely with college courses that these students pursued after school.

The past students also indicated that teachers were important for referring them to the Guidance Counsellor when they needed it. One student recounted that sometimes when they were struggling in school "*a teacher would talk to the Guidance Counsellor*" rather than having to initiate contact with the Guidance Counsellor (PS 4). This also extended to teachers helping students contact the Guidance Counsellor if they "*couldn't find [the Guidance Counsellor]*" (PS 2). This was a reciprocal process as the Guidance Counsellor sometimes conversed with teachers on behalf of students. This was especially useful when students found a particular teacher difficult to approach. Some of the interviewed students found having a personal relationship with the Guidance Counsellor helped them interact with certain teachers.

According to one student, some teachers "*could have been more supportive and helpful to you to maybe keep you in a higher level class*" (PS 1). This student found some teachers were old fashioned and "*conservative*" in the way they interacted with students, merely telling students that they were "*…not capable and kicking you out*" (PS 1). This student felt that if all the teachers "*were trained a little more in how to deal*" with communicating with students and supporting them it would "*not just be a Guidance Counsellor but nearly everyone [which would] be helpful*" (PS 1).

Some of the students also referenced their families as being influential educational and career decision-making, especially regarding their subject choices following the Junior Certificate exam. One student's father was a support in the application for SUSI the grant "*so [they] didn't go to the Guidance Counsellor*" (PS 4). All of the students, however, did recall the Guidance Counsellor giving detailed information to them regarding making an application to SUSI also.

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A number of the past students also spoke about the recently established Mentoring programme in the case school. While these programmes complemented the goals of the guidance counselling service, they were not run by the Guidance Counsellor specifically. According to one student a "*couple of teachers I think took it on themselves*" to coordinate the mentoring (PS 2). Another student recalled that teachers were given mentoring roles with Senior Cycle students, with "*each teacher [taking] on about three students*" who they "*met up with once or twice*" across the sixth year (PS 1). The teachers would provide mentoring for the students in the form of *"an informal chat"* regarding how they were getting on in school in areas such as "*time management and things … and mock results*" (PS 1). The Mentoring programme also involved Senior Cycle students being paired with Junior Cycle students to provide the younger students with mentorship and support. One past student recalled that their "*group had to help third years look at … I think it was Qualifax and the CAO*" (PS 2). However, the same student questioned the value of this process suggesting that "*a lot of 6th years shouldn't really be mentoring a third year*" and that "*there wasn't much preparation time at all*" for the mentors (PS 2). Nonetheless, all of the four past students continue to participate in the case school's Mentoring programme, returning to the school to give talks about their experiences in college to current students. One student felt it was "*good, we are then invited back to talk to a class of fourth or fifth years but my experience of the leaving cert and college*" (PS 3). This was something that a number of the PS suggested they felt proud to be part of and were happy to "*give back to the school*" (PS 4).

5.3.2.2 GUIDANCE COUNSELLING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The Guidance Counsellor is responsible for delivery of a range of aspects of guidance to both Junior and Senior Cycle groupings in the case school. In Senior Cycle, the guidance counsellor provides TY, LCA and 6th year Leaving Certificate weekly guidance classes. All of the students agreed that these classes were "v*ery productive so most of the problems got solved in the classes*" (PS 3). The classes also provided students with an opportunity to talk with the guidance counsellor about their concerns. The Guidance Counsellor was also open to being contacted by students outside of the class times for appointments.

The four students also reported a difference between the guidance counselling they received in the Junior and Senior Cycle. Some students felt that they "*only really had contact with the Guidance Counsellor in 5th and 6th year"* (PS 4) and did not really have any contact in the Junior Cycle. One significant difference was there were *"no weekly classes"* in the Junior Cycle, leading to some students feeling that they were not sure they could have approached the Guidance Counsellor who "*…never really talked to us*" (PS 2). Others did note that they had some dealings with the Guidance Counsellor in the Junior Cycle, but that there was "*much more contact in the Senior Cycle*" (PS 1). The TY was the first time that students had scheduled classes with the Guidance Counsellor and this was perceived as a significant change as "*…it was like another subject was added…It was the subject of careers straight away*" (PS 2).

Nevertheless, one area of consistency between both the Junior and Senior Cycle was the provision of personal counselling. According to one student, there was awareness that this was available to students in the Junior Cycle, where "*…you could definitely see a big guidance counselling aspect to it*" (PS 3). This was echoed by another student who noticed the Guidance

Counsellor "*would talk to a lot of students*" personally when they were in "*first to third year*" (PS 4). This one-to-one personal guidance was an aspect that students were aware of continuing into the Senior Cycle.

According to all of the students, access to one-to-one appointments with the Guidance Counsellor were "*not structured*" (PS 4) and there was no formal schedule of prearranged appointments for students. One student characterised it as students trying "*to catch [the Guidance Counsellor] in the hallway or [guidance] office*" [and]*…there wasn't many boundaries in place*" (PS 2). However, all of the students viewed this approach to making an appointment positively as the Guidance Counsellor "*was pleasant, friendly….easily approachable*" (PS 1), and it removed any complications that "*might put you off maybe going and looking for help*" (PS 2). The students felt that this student-led approach to accessing the Guidance Counsellor was appropriate to their needs while they were in school as "*it was never too much or too little… It was always based off supply and demand really*" (PS 2). One student felt it was "*always based off our needs*" (PS 2) while another stated the Guidance Counsellor "*would stay back after school*" to meet because the student always hated missing class (PS 3). In addition, this student did not feel pressurised to engage but was encouraged to wait until ready to talk about an issue to the Guidance Counsellor who stated "*I'm here for you, whenever you're ready just come and let me know. And this is nothing to be ashamed off, no one is perfect*" (PS 3). The interviewed students suggested they did not feel like they were "*just talking to a teacher*" (PS 4), but someone who was able to talk to them "*like a person*" (PS 3).

Nonetheless, some students identified that this made the student responsible "*to make the first move*" (PS 3). One student who had a good relationship with the Guidance Counsellor noted that as Junior Cycle students do not have classes or much contact with the Guidance Counsellor this may "*not be the same for everyone obviously*" (PS 3). Another student suggested that classes or other contact with the Guidance Counsellor should be "*…implemented at a lower level…down at Junior Cert level*" so more students would then feel "*…more familiar with the Guidance Counsellor*" (PS 1). Another noted that the Guidance Counsellor was also a Year Head for the 1st year class group, which "*could have been a problem*" for students seeking appointments (PS 4).

Some of the students who had developed a relationship with the Guidance Counsellor during their time in the school remained in contact with the service after they had left. This was particularly the case for students who had engaged with a HE access programme from a local university. Two of the students discussed developing a strong bond with the Guidance Counsellor through the intensive guidance support while applying for the HE access programme. One student felt that the guidance counsellor's support was "*a really great thing*" (PS 3), and described how this support continued after leaving the school and entering the college environment.

All of the interviewed students have been returning to the case school to give talks or provide mentoring to the current student body. One student described how the Guidance Counsellor was instrumental in asking past students to "*talk to the school… about the benefits [they] got from the HE access programme*" (PS 3). Another student also talked about being happy to "*give back*" to the school by returning to talk to the current students (PS 4).

5.3.2.3 DOMAINS OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

All of the four students acknowledged that the Guidance Counsellor addressed all three aspects guidance provision, personal, education and career guidance. With regard to personal guidance counselling, only two of the four students interviewed had received personal support from the Guidance Counsellor, while the remaining two had not experienced a problem that required the assistance of the Guidance Counsellor. Although the contact process may appear informal one student stated that "*once you got into maybe a session with [the Guidance Counsellor] then it was very structured and formal*" (PS 1). This was echoed by another student who felt that the approach in the counselling sessions appeared "*very structured…professional and well put together*" (PS 3). Another student reported feeling confident in the Guidance Counsellor's professionalism and approach to problem solving (PS2). The students also reported that there was good follow up with them after one-to-one appointments with often took the form of informal communications or meetings in the school. According to one student the Guidance Counsellor "*…was always talking to you on the corridor "did you get that done", oh I forgot "oh, this Thursday you need to get this done*" (PS 3).

In the domain of educational guidance, some of the students believed they did not need the assistance of the Guidance Counsellor whilst others did seek advice or support. This support extended to educational challenges or interpersonal problems in communicating with teachers and gave such advice as "*…you should think about doing after school study or see something or take an appointment with the teacher and talk about why you fail it and everything like that*" (PS 3). This student also received guidance from the Guidance Counsellor regarding subject choices for the Senior Cycle and support when struggling academically to improve their academic performance. Interestingly, the student felt the Guidance Counsellor "*knew at that point what subjects [I was] strong at and what subjects [I was] not really strong at*" from talking to other teachers (PS 3). This was then used to generate a plan which was communicated in a clear way to the student during the one-to-one appointment.

While two of the four students recalled the Guidance Counsellor supporting them with their subject choices for the Senior Cycle at the start of 5th year, two students did not consult the guidance counsellor prior to making their choices. One used his performance during the Junior Certificate exam to guide him in his choices (PS 1), while another talked to his family (PS 2). In addition, the Guidance Counsellor was responsible for the coordination of subject choices where students were requested to complete a subject selection sheet and another member of staff managed the process. The Guidance Counsellor did not have a role in the process by which students changed their subjects or classes (P4). The two students who consulted the Guidance Counsellor regarding subject choice also applied for the HE access programme to a local university. Both received detailed and extended advice and support in the choice of their subjects and across the application process for the HE access course. Their application to the HE access course was a consideration in their choice of subjects, especially in the case of PS 4.

According to the students, generally, accessing advice and educational guidance depended on students taking the initiative to approach the Guidance Counsellor for support. The support of the student's educational progression extended into the latter classes for the 6th year students.

After the deadlines for the CAO application and SUSI had passed, the Guidance Counsellor provided some study skills classes. While there appeared to be disagreement regarding whether it was one (PS 1) or a series of classes (PS 3), all of the students recalled some aspect of the classes focussing on supporting student to study or maximise their performance in exams.

Finally, the students felt that the main focus of guidance provision was career guidance. In terms of the different types of guidance the findings indicate that all of the students strongly associated the guidance classes with career guidance. They all remembered having weekly classes with the Guidance Counsellor during 6th year which were "*pretty much just college and careers*" (PS 4). In contrast, one student associated social and personal guidance with SPHE classes, "*most of the social stuff would have been covered in the likes of SPHE*" (PS 1). This student stated, "*in the actual guidance counselling …classes*" the focus was "*more about how to get your college course and school*" and addressed topics such as "*the CAO and looked for PLCs*" but the "*selection of courses was probably the biggest"* aspect of what took place (PS 1). There was also an emphasis on university courses that were "*local if possible because transport and all that*" (PS 1), and the Guidance Counsellor became very involved in supporting students with their CAO choices. Another student suggested that "*you couldn't do anything with CAO unless you went to [the Guidance Counsellor]*" (PS 4). Three of the students also recalled having career guidance classes with the Guidance Counsellor during TY where they explored career interests and options. These classes were mostly "*independent working on the computer*" (PS 4) and would "*look at what courses were … like that*" (PS 2). These classes were also focussed on the CAO system and HE courses and the students explored subjects they might need to get a place on these courses. Students found this gave them an "*opportunity to figure out what you want to do in life and… what subjects you want to pick from it"* (PS 3).

While all of the students emphasised the importance placed on CAO applications during these classes with the Guidance Counsellor, some also recalled being encouraged to make applications to PLC courses where they were available:

> [The Guidance Counsellor] would always say like "*always try to go to college and if you don't there's always going to be a PLC.…have the PLC as your back up plan*". (PS 3)

The Guidance Counsellor covered a broader curriculum of material during the weekly guidance classes with 6th year students. For example, one student discussed how other class groupings would cover career issues from a different perspective, with the LCA students doing work skills and work placement tasks rather than CAO courses. This student suggested this different approach was because these groups were seen as not likely to "*go to college, they'll go straight into work*" (PS 3). Another student echoed this when recalling that "*Internships*" and "*work placement*" were covered with some class groupings, but that these were "*a minority*" (PS 1). The Guidance Counsellor also supported students to apply for "*apprenticeships*" for students who "*… instead of going to college [would] go and take apprenticeships and work*" (PS 1). Nevertheless, one student felt that the Guidance Counsellor "*was always trying to keep [them] on top of things so [they] don't miss out on anything*" (PS 3). In additions to the CAO application process the Guidance Counsellor also addressed "*grants and stuff*" (PS 1) during the weekly guidance classes with 6th years. Due dates were highlighted by the Guidance Counsellor to students, "*the final date for SUSI is this specific day and you need to finish it, you don't want to be behind*" (PS 3).

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While all of the students articulated that the focus of the guidance classes was career guidance, they also identified other outcomes from their personal contact with the Guidance Counsellor through these classes. Some suggested they were instrumental in their making contact on a one-to-one basis with the Guidance Counsellor for social and personal guidance as well as career guidance. Two of the students recalled approaching the Guidance Counsellor regarding a HE access programme referred to in class and receiving his individual attention and support in applying for it. One suggested the Guidance Counsellor "*really forced that on me – not forced it on me but he was really about ...recommending it to me*" (PS 4). Another recalled that the guidance counsellor "*chased [them] all the way to get [their] HE access programme interview done*" (PS 3). This level of personalised support extended to developing awareness of upcoming deadlines, with one student recalling the guidance counsellor telling them that the "*interview is coming now*" and that they "*need to be ready for that*" (PS 3). This student also recalled the Guidance Counsellor providing personal and motivational support. Both these students were very happy with the level of support and guidance they had received.

The guidance counsellor was also visibly involved in supporting students across a range of other HE progression activities related to career guidance including organising student trips to *"open days in local universities"* and students were "*definitely encouraged to go to as many of those as we could"* (PS 2). Another student suggested a personal supportive element *"it was good that your Guidance Counsellor is always gonna be there"* (PS 3). Another student recalled that the guidance classes were used to prepare students before they went to these event where the Guidance Counsellor in advance (PS 2). The Guidance Counsellor also collaborated with a local technology company to provide career skills support to students including C.V. preparation and interview practices.

This concludes the findings from the past student interviews. The students reportedly positively on the levels of support they had received from the guidance service, especially in Senior Cycle. They placed importance on their interactions and relationships with teachers to support them in making decisions and to make contact with the Guidance Counsellor for personal guidance. This referral role was identified as being particularly important in the Junior Cycle where students have less contact time with the Guidance Counsellor. They identified different levels of engagement with the guidance counsellor between the Junior and Senior Cycle and this was a concern for some of them in relation to students currently in Junior Cycle, especially as contact with the Guidance Counsellor was primarily initiated by the students themselves. They found the guidance classes very effective in supporting them in their career decisions. All of them found the Guidance Counsellor very approachable and supportive in one-to-one sessions for personal or career issues.

5.4 DATA SOURCE 3: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

This section presents the findings from the three focus groups carried out in the case school. Two were conducted with a sample of students from the Junior Cycle (JC) and Senior Cycle (SC). The third was conducted with a group of parents of students currently in the case school. The findings will be presented in two separate sections to reflect the difference between the two distinct cohorts of participants.

5.4.1 FOCUS GROUP WITH JUNIOR AND SENIOR CYCLE STUDENTS

The data from the two individual focus groups was analysed separately before being combined as single analysis. Two main themes emerged in the findings: a whole school approach to guidance counselling and students engagement with the school guidance service.

5.4.1.1 A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

This first theme relates to students understanding of a whole school approach to guidance counselling. While the students did not ascribe this term explicitly to their discussion of guidance counselling within the case school they addressed many aspects of the way guidance is provided to them through whole school structures.

There are a number of cross curricular initiative in operation in the case school that related to guidance provision and their impact emerged quite strongly in the discussions with both student groups including the Whole School Guidance Programme, Friendship Week, Subject Taster programmes for 1st year students and the. In Friendship Week students receive classes "*on bullying and all of that*" (JC student) and have classes with the Guidance Counsellor who will "*talk about the exams and how to cope with them*" (JC student). The students also reported that the Guidance Counsellor introduces and outlines the guidance role within the school to them. During the Subject Taster programme first year students get the opportunity to try out subjects. Overall, students have six weeks to try out two subjects at time for two week blocks which allows them to "*…kind of know what all the subjects are all about*" (SC student) before they select their final subject choices for the Junior Cycle. This programme is coordinated by the TY Coordinator within the school and the students did not recall any involvement or input directly from the Guidance Counsellor.

With regard to the Whole School Guidance Programme the students reported being aware of different activities related to careers or college course selection in the school, specifically "*…in 2nd year you are more involved with stuff like that*" (JC student). According to the students in the two focus groups, the programme involves having "*people in to talk about their careers*" and going to visit one local university in particular (JC student). The objective is to "*..get everyone thinking about going to college who hadn't thought about going before* " (JC student). One Senior Cycle student felt that "*this empowers the students from 2nd to 3rd year a lot*" and has a positive impact on students.

A number of other aspects of the Whole School Guidance Programme such as College Awareness Week, Speed Careers and mentoring are offered to students. In some cases, however, the students did not appear to understand that these cross curricular activities are

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aspects of the Whole School Guidance Programme. College Awareness Week is relatively new and has "*been going on for two years now*" (SC student) and involves students learning about different college courses and exploring some in more detail. The students reported they are brought to visit colleges or universities within the local region and do projects on particular colleges or college programmes. Another aspect of the College Awareness week noted was:

> They also did this thing last year during careers week when all the teachers had to put their own degrees and colleges that they went to on their door and they would tell you, like, their own experiences of college and how many points they needed and so on… (SC Student)

The Speed Careers initiative provides students and parents with access to "*…lots of different people…working like different places*" (JC Student) such as "*garda and people working like different places and then and we had a sheet and went around and ask them what they did in their jobs*" (JC Student). One Senior Cycle student felt this initiative was "*really cool about our school*" because it "*is trying to increase careers awareness*" and that is a *"perspective…I think that is good about guidance"*.

The Mentoring of the Whole School Guidance Programme has become increasingly obvious to the students in the school. This structured programme involves younger students being mentored by older students so that they can ask questions or receive guidance from them. However, some reservations were expressed about the format and purpose of the mentoring process amongst both focus groups. One Junior Cycle student suggested that "*nobody really knows how that works*" and they "*really cannot see how that could be helpful*". This student explained:

> Yeah, well you're sitting there for about half an hour not really knowing what to talk about // The sheets are very like, what's your name, what do you want to do in college, what are your hobbies. (JC student)

On the other hand, a Senior Cycle student specified that "*we [Senior Cycle students] mentor 3rd years now and we give them information about CAO*", whilst another Senior Cycle student stated it "*one of our duties*". However, this student also admitted that "*we don't even know how to fill it in ourselves*" and that "*I think that 3rd years know more about college application than we do*". Another aspect of the Mentoring programme involves Senior Cycle students being assigned teachers as their mentors. Importantly, however, it was the student's perception that the function of this mentoring was to support the mentored students with their studies rather than being specifically related to career guidance, *"mainly to keep you on track with your studies, they are not giving you guidance"* (SC student). Another Senior Cycle student suggested that the teacher mentoring is "*more to keep you grounded*" and to check "*how are you getting on with your study, how are you, in general, getting on in school*". Some of the Senior Cycle students also reported using their teacher mentors as a source of feedback on their own level of academic performance, progression and level of exam preparation;

> ..seeing as most of the teachers that you get, kind of either know you, or like, at least they have your results so that they can kind of say yeah, "you should really be working harder" or, "yeah you are at the right spot and keep working and all that stuff. (SC student)

Another important factor that impacted on how a whole school approach to guidance counselling operates in the case school is student's relationships with their teachers. They were described as being strong, positive and helpful for choosing subjects during first year:

> Your subject teacher may have said to you "" I think you would be good for this subject" and you would be like "Thanks" or whatever and they would try and encourage me to like go towards my best subjects. (JC student)

The school initially instigated such relationships "*during the friendship week, [when] it was said that you should go to any teacher that you feel comfortable with and they can help you out*" (JC student). This encouragement to find a teacher they are *"comfortable talking to"* appeared to have been adopted by many of the students. One Senior Cycle student reported developing a strong relationship with one of her teachers in previous years "*even though I don't have her as a teacher any more, I still trust her. So the bond that you form…*". The pattern of students going to teachers to ask questions and seek advice appears to be linked to their level of engagement with the guidance service:

> We rarely, we don't often see the Guidance Counsellor, like one-to-one, we'd be in Maths or English more often, we'll see that teacher more often. We'd know where we stand with that teacher, what we can say, what we can't say. So we would be more comfortably be able to go up to this teacher ask such and such rather than go to someone we don't often see and talk about whatever it is that is. (SC student)

While some students mentioned that they are aware of the Guidance Counsellor's role in supporting them with personal issues, they often choose to go to another teacher first, prior to talking to the Guidance Counsellor. As one Junior Cycle student suggested, she "*would prefer the teacher rather than the Guidance Counsellor because I know the teacher more…*". A Senior Cycle student stated:

> I wouldn't have gone to a Guidance Counsellor, first of all, I would not have known who to go to but say, if the problem was pressing I would probably have gone to talk to my form teachers or the Year Head. (SC student)

Other students talked about teachers being the first point of contact in the referral process when they experience personal problems or need support:

> I didn't go to the Guidance Counsellor to talk…about it first but I went to the teacher that I know that I would get along well with and they would advise me to do a good thing and afterwards I talked to the Guidance Counsellor who sent me to the person, the psychologist .. so like it is a link and the information gets passed on in the school. You don't go straight to the Guidance Counsellor. (SC student)

Another factor relates to students' perception of the strong focus on academic achievement for students in the case school. They perceived this as being quite pervasive and something

they were very aware of. According to one Junior Cycle student "*the whole school, the school just grades everything… Get good grades*". Their view is that this message is coming from across the school staff as a whole rather than from any one staff member in particular. The students discussed a number of specialised staff within the school, such as "*the Guidance Counsellor, TY coordinator…. teachers, year heads*" as being involved in "*…pushing that message*" (JC student). This message was interpreted by one student as "*get good grades or you have no future*" (JC student) with agreement form others in the Junior Cycle focus group. For another Junior Cycle it "*should be the School motto!*" This message about achievement is something the students are conscious of "*since we came into school*" but some of them felt "*…it has gotten worse this year*" (JC student) due to them being in 3rd year and approaching their Junior Certificate exam. Another student stated:

> it has been, get good grades or you will not be put into this class for your Junior Cycle… and if you are not put into this class for your Junior Cycle you will not be put into this class for your Leaving Cert and then you are not going to get into college….it is like this kind of continuous. (JC student)

According to the students these messages are not something that school staff state frequently rather the message is conveyed in "*the way people speak about*" academic achievement and "*it is an atmosphere… that you have to do this, you have to get 620 points*" (SC student) in the Leaving Certificate. This point was also echoed by another Senior Cycle student who felt that "*…everyone is being geared toward getting 625 points*" and while "*…they are not saying that*" it "*is the way they make you feel*".

An associated issue that both focus group members discussed was their experiences of stress as an outcome of this atmosphere of academic attainment. One Junior Cycle student suggested this "*..is very stressful*" but felt that teachers within the school added to the students stress by "*piling on the homework*". This student questioned whether all the teachers "*…know how much they put on us*". The students also discussed a heavy schedule of testing and assessment with study, homework and assessment adding to their stress levels. According to one Junior Cycle student there was a "*constant exam, exam, exam [and] never any time, like,[to] take our breath*". It was also students' perception that teachers were not always sympathetic to their feelings of stress, "*if you are stressed they are just, like, you should be stressed, they are tests for a reason, you are meant to be stressed*" (JC student). One Senior Cycle student stated:

> They tell you that you have to do a lot of study and saying this very dramatically 'you are going nowhere' kind of thing. But now that we are getting into the later stages they are kind of going 'this is what you need to do to get what you want. (SC student)

5.4.1.2 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SCHOOL GUIDANCE SERVICE

The second main theme relates to students interactions with the school guidance service. This theme will be discussed with regard to observed divergences in guidance provision between Junior and Senior Cycle, how students gain access to the Guidance Counsellor, and the domains of guidance counselling.

The distribution of guidance provision across Junior and Senior Cycle emerged in the focus groups. The perception of one Senior Cycle student is that guidance counselling is "...*sort of like two parts. In the Junior Cycle it is more bullying and how you are getting on at school. Then at Senior Cycle it is all career and college focused*". This point was also echoed by another Senior Cycle student who felt:

> In the Junior Cycle, if [names Guidance Counsellor] came to the room you would be more, it would be for, like we said for bullying, but for Senior Cycle if you are called it would be more about college. (SC student)

The level of interaction with the guidance service in the two Cycles is quite different as one Junior Cycle student stated they didn't "...*really remember any classes in guidance*". Junior Cycle students appear to view the Guidance Counsellor as seeking them out in order to manage particular behavioural, disciplinary or personal matters:

> You know the Junior Cycle in school, the Guidance Counsellor is more for if you are doing something wrong than if you were, like in 1ˢᵗ the 3ʳᵈ year the only lads that would be brought to the GC would be if they were taking drugs or something, there was no onus on "oh, I want to do this, can I talk to you?" or anything... (SC student)

This point was also echoed by another Senior Cycle student who admitted that "*the only time that I ever talked to the* Guidance Counsellor *in the Junior cycle was just for personal things. That was that*". The student observed that this has an impact on how the Guidance Counsellor's role is perceived in the Junior Cycle compared to the Senior Cycle, where it is seen as "*the career counsellor*" (SC student). Some Senior Cycle students saw this lack of contact with the Guidance Counsellor in the Junior Cycle as a deficit. One Senior Cycle student observed that "..*in 1ˢᵗ - 3ʳᵈ It [guidance] was non-existent, for me anyway*". This point was echoed by another Senior Cycle student who felt "*It was very sink or swim in 1ˢᵗ to 3ʳᵈ year*".

While the 6ᵗʰ year Senior Cycle students have timetabled guidance classes with the Guidance Counsellor, the fifth year students do not, leading to one Senior Cycle student commenting that "*it just disappeared in 5ᵗʰ year and then and then it came back this year [6ᵗʰ year]*". As TY students also have timetabled classes with the Guidance Counsellor this was identified by some Senior Cycle students as being particularly helpful in relation to career issues. It also highlighted the differences between Junior and Senior Cycle guidance provision for students:

> But I think that that was just TY. I think but, I think that it was in TY that it changed and it became `kind of realistic that, it all kind of happened. But I think in 1ˢᵗ- 3ʳᵈ year it was non-existent (SC student)

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This issue relates to the second sub-theme which is students' access to the Guidance Counsellor in the case school. The students in both focus groups recognised that the Guidance Counsellor works very hard and has a high workload. They felt that in these circumstances the guidance counsellor was "*doing the best….given such a limited space*" (SC student). This was also echoed by another Senior Cycle student who felt that one Guidance Counsellor for "*the amount of students in our school….is really not sufficient because, like, ….so many people have different needs in different years and [they] is just one…..*". One student offered:

> I think that, to combat that I think there should be. I don't think is should just be [the Guidance Counsellor]….. There should be more of a guidance team instead of it all falling to the Guidance Counsellor. (SC student)

In relation to timetabled guidance classes the Senior Cycle students noted that they are not always as regular as other subject classes:

> What is bad with it though is that every year before us has had a set class for careers, but now we don't. You'll get taken out of SPHE or Religion class once a week each time (SC student)

A Senior Cycle student further pointed out that these classes are "*shared up against something else*". The Senior Cycle students suggested that this issue was possibly augmented by the large numbers of students in the current 6th year group and that "*last year it was maybe easier*" due to the smaller class sizes. Additionally, one student perceived that the timetabled session is not always enough time to address their guidance needs:

> ….so you can't actually have as much time I think….you are only really able to have three. … We might have more in the future but not weekly. (SC student)

Students also discussed their understanding of the referral processes they need to go through to access the Guidance Counsellor for one-to-one appointments. The most common method appears to be through informal approaches through the guidance office or requesting one from the Guidance Counsellor directly. A number of students also approached their form or subject teachers prior to accessing the Guidance Counsellor. A Junior Cycle student suggested that "*you can go up to your year teacher or your form teachers and then they will go and speak to [the Guidance Counsellor]*", while a Senior Cycle student suggested the form teacher may also "*organise with the Guidance Counsellor a time to meet*". Nevertheless, a number of Junior Cycle students reported delays in getting a one-to-one appointment due to the Guidance Counsellor's workload with one stating "*sometimes [the Guidance Counsellor] can look real busy, like*". Another Junior Cycle student stated "*it can take days*" for the Guidance Counsellor to come back to students. Other routes for making appointments' were identified by the students such as "*a box outside [the guidance] office and you are meant to put in*" (SC student) a note or message and the Guidance Counsellor reverts back to the student although one Senior Cycle stated not receiving a response to the request.

A number of Junior Cycle students also articulated concerns about seeking an appointment with the Guidance Counsellor for personal counselling which were mostly related to a lack of privacy in the way the guidance counsellor makes contact with them following a referral or request for a meeting:

> I don't think it works well because, like, you are in one of the classes and the guidance counsellor just walks in and call you out and when you come back in everyone knows that, like, everyone in your class is asking what was that? And you are like mind your own business. (JC student)

This anxiety was echoed by another Junior Cycle student

> ...like, when you get called out by the guidance counsellor, it is quite obvious that you are being called out for a particular reason. It is not like you are in trouble or anything. It is just quite personal. (JC student)

Student's perceptions regarding the three domains of guidance counselling offered by the guidance service in the school were also an important facet of the focus group discussions. Regarding personal guidance, one Junior Cycle student had *"gone to the Guidance Counsellor with personal things"* and found "*it was pretty good".* One Junior Cycle student "*felt comfortable talking to the guidance counsellor"* regarding a personal issue. Another Junior Cycle student found the Guidance Counsellor was "*more of a router for people who were better off helping you for personal problems*" and found the personal counselling with the Guidance Counsellor "*didn't actually help that much with the problem".* However, this student found "*getting the information… incredibly useful"* because "*I wouldn't have gone and found out"* about it. Another Junior Cycle student also stated the Guidance Counsellor provided a supportive role in when the student "*was finding it hard to make friends".*

With regards to educational guidance, students from across both focus groups discussed the issue of deciding on their subject choices. One Junior Cycle student commented that prior to making subject choices, "*they never really spoke to you about it*", they just handed students "*a sheet*" and "*picked two*" subjects. Another Junior Cycle student suggested this approach was ineffective as it was "*just doing what [they are] told to do….".* This student felt that being talked to "*on your own*" would be more personal and more effective than being talked to as a class. A Senior Cycle student stated "*it was left up to yourself to research*" subjects. The importance of subject choice and future career options or entry to particular college courses was recognised by some students in the Senior Cycle group:

> I felt like, if we had of got Guidance Counsellor, because I didn't do TY so I didn't have the experience of kind of. But when you are picking subjects in 5th years that will .., it'll limit your course choices. I felt that there was no GC for that at all…no talk of subject choices. (SC student)

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Another Senior Cycle student commented that "*if you didn't know at that point what you wanted to do and you chose based on what you liked, you know, you'd limit yourself. You are cutting yourself off.*" Some students sought advice or guidance from other people in their lives such as family members including parents "*because they might know what would be best for me*" (JC student). Other students commented that they didn't discuss their subject choices with anybody because, as one Junior Cycle student I have "*…decided myself but haven't discussed it*".

Career guidance emerged across both focus groups as having a strong position in the school through specific career related initiatives and the guidance service, in particular in the Senior Cycle. As stated earlier progression to HEI"s appears to be a recurring theme in career guidance provision. According to one Junior Cycle student "*basically they just want you all to go to college*". During guidance classes in TY and 6th year the students reported they did "*research*" on their "*preferential courses*" by completing sheets to identify "*how many points were needed*" and their reason for choosing a course (SC student). This student stated:

> The majority of the time that I remember guidance it was really, "OK, where are you going to college, what do you want to do?" There is not really…. I don't think I have ever really gotten any information from the school about doing courses, like say if I wanted to or be an electrician, I know that a lot of that is more, you would really learn on the job, so … (SC Student)

One Senior Cycle student noted that there were many varieties of "*leaflets about college, especially [name one university] in the school*" but there was not the same access to information about other types of further education or work options. Indeed, a Senior Cycle student said the Guidance Counsellor was very "*focused on the people who want to go to college*" and students had "*never seen them talking about people who want to do a PLC or people who want to go straight into the workforce*". This was echoed by another Senior Cycle student who commented that "*if you want to go into maybe training or into…PLC…it means that you have to kind of do a little bit of searching yourself*". The same student also said that other teachers may be able to help students with identifying these courses even though it "*isn't advertised everywhere around the school that there is other things other than college*". Students from across both focus groups expressed reservations regarding the emphasis on going to college by the guidance service. One Junior Cycle student commented that "*it should not always be about college*". Another suggested that the Guidance Counsellor could "*maybe just to let people know that there are other options besides College.…there are other jobs out there for you*" (JC student). A Senior Cycle student also queried "*if the school can arrange for us to look at all the jobs in college why can't they arrange for us to look at the jobs outside of college?*"

A number of the Senior Cycle students had some concerns about their understanding of the CAO course selection process. One commented that, while there "*were lots of leaflets on courses around the school*" she felt that students were not given much information "*around how to apply for that colleges or what you need to get into those college*" (SC student). Guidance classes were described as "*…mostly only careers. It is just kind of looking up courses for the CAO and finding out about those courses*" (SC student). Some of the Senior Cycle students expressed confusion regarding how to complete the CAO application. One student stated that they got all their

information regarding completion of the CAO process from independently attending the Higher Options event rather than from the school guidance service. However, another suggested that the Guidance Counsellor's workload might be impacting on the capacity of the guidance service to meet their individual needs, so students also need to be self-responsible.

This concludes the findings from the two focus groups with a sample of current students from the Junior and Senior Cycles. The findings have explicated their viewpoints related to cross curricular guidance initiatives in the context of personal, social educational and career guidance within a whole school approach. These initiatives appear to be particularly important during the Junior Cycle where students have limited contact with the guidance service. The relationship between students and teachers emerged as an important aspect of curricular and personal supports, including support from individual teachers and referral to the guidance service. The pressure of academic achievement and progression to higher education emerged within the groups with some students articulating stress and anxiety. A number of students had benefitted from one-to-one sessions' with the Guidance Counsellor, regardless of whether the appointment was made formally or informally. Finally, some of the students were cognisant of the extensive workload of the Guidance Counsellor in meeting the needs of the student body.

5.4.2 FOCUS GROUP WITH PARENTS

This section presents the findings from the focus group with parents of students from the case school. Three main themes emerged in the findings: parents understanding of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the curriculum, their engagement with the school's guidance service, and their role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

5.4.2.1 PARENTS UNDERSTANDING OF A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN THE CASE SCHOOL

This first theme relates to parents understandings of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. Diverse perspectives emerged in relation to what guidance counselling involves. The majority of the parents felt that the Guidance Counsellor's priority is "*guidance for the vocation*" (Parent). For example, one parent stated:

> If you say guidance counselling to me automatically I think careers and what's out there. So I suppose I see career guidance as somebody guiding them on the path. (Parent)

While some parents admitted having limited knowledge of the school guidance they reported that they heard from the Guidance Counsellor mostly "*around the careers aspect more so than the guidance aspects*" (Parent). Some parents also recounted that their children tell them that they're doing "*college, college, college*" (Parent) as part of their guidance classes.

Educational guidance was referred to by the parents, albeit as a method of providing support to their children on subject choices during 5th year. This was described as being only "*a little bit*" of support "*…because it seems to hit them in fifth year and then it's kind like oh we've to pick all these choices*" (Parent). Some parents felt that support from the guidance service for subject choice selection needs to be provided much earlier in the curriculum.

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However, there was significant confusion amongst parents about the personal and social aspects of guidance counselling provision. Some parents felt that the Guidance Counsellor is not involved in the wellbeing of students as other staff members are responsible for it. For example, one parent felt that there would be "*a chaplain in the school at least for all of that…*". Another parent suggested that "*…the chaplain is for the more spiritual aspect of things and for kids who are struggling with different things*". Lack of clarity on roles was evident for one parent who commented:

> as parents, we're not clear enough on the role boundaries perhaps of the Guidance Counsellor, and what that encompasses, and maybe where it crosses with the chaplain.(Parent)

A number of parents felt that this role confusion might influence them in giving advice to their children about dealing with personal challenges in school:

> I would never think of saying to the kids if they say "I'm being bullied"…well talk to the career guidance… it wouldn't even cross my mind – talk to the chaplain or your form teacher. (Parent)

This confusion was also associated with difficulties in understanding what guidance counselling encompasses as it "*means different things in different schools*" (Parent). One parent commented that that having "*maybe a daughter in another school or a son in this school…then they can actually mean different things in different schools*". This was echoed by another parent who was uncertain what about guidance entailed and how the different aspects of guidance are inter-related:

> I just think the whole word "guidance" is too wide. I don't know if they need to do a PR campaign and change their name! I just think guidance counselling no one's sure of what they mean … I mean cos I think guidance, I think counselling kind of a soft role. Whereas careers it's very business-like. I'd think of them as being quite different (Parent)

One parent viewed guidance as a "*peripheral subject… as additional extra*" that students are lucky to have access to:

> It's not core I would think…it's the class that gets neglected because it's not important "sure, if we don't get career guidance we'll catch up again next week. (Parent)

This view that guidance is *"additional"* and not *"core"* was seen as especially true in the case of the Junior Cycle. For example, one parent did not "*think there was any guidance for the Junior Cert*" and guidance is something that "*happened in 6th year*" (Parent). Another suggested that students do not "*really have much to do with the guidance until after third year*" (Parent) and particularly in 6th year where guidance is exclusively focused on career issues and support with CAO choices. The parents appeared to be more knowledgeable about the personal and social aspect of provision to Junior Cycle students in the case school. But there was still confusion about the nature of delivery to Junior Cycle class groupings. One parent, for example, suggested that "*if you're talking about not just careers*" aspects "*then …the junior certs have the SPHE course which is their guidance of the third year …where they can discuss issues in class*". Other parents agreed with this perspective and felt that SPHE provision was closely aligned with guidance provision during the Junior Cycle years. However, another parent suggested that she was "*still trying to understand what SPHE is!*" and was also confused regarding what guidance counselling provision in Junior Cycle entailed.

A number of parents concurred that there are differences in guidance counselling provision between the Junior Cycle and the Senior Cycle. In the Junior Cycle there should be a focus on "*discussion of personal issues*" and support of students as they develop (Parent). However, while guidance counselling in the Junior Cycle may be given over to:

> all that nice personal development stuff…once you move into fifth year it's like here we go now, career!… But I think when you get into fifth year … it's focusing on the real stuff then. (Parent)

The parents articulated that students in Senior Cycle work in class settings with the Guidance Counsellor and that "*a lot of the time they're on the computers*" researching career options and the CAO using "*portals and all sort of things like that*" (Parent). All of the parents felt that Senior Cycle guidance provision was mainly focussed on the CAO, especially for sixth year students. One parent felt that "*it's too late*" and places "*too much pressure*" on students. Many of the parents agreed with this and felt that students would benefit from commencing career focussed guidance provision earlier in their schooling.

The role of other staff members in the provision of guidance counselling within the school was raised in the focus group. These roles were mainly focussed on meeting students' needs for personal or social guidance. The parents referred to a well-functioning and *"very effective"* referral system within the case school, with some of them sharing their personal experiences of positive outcomes for their children:

> If you've a problem you go to the form teachers, then the form teacher if they can't help will refer you to the Year Head. And then if that… [names Guidance Counsellor] is the next call. And possibly if you need outside help or…or just help from [the Guidance Counsellor] (Parent)

The referral system involves a range of school staff, including form teachers, Year Heads and other teaching staff working together to support students or put them in contact with the Guidance Counsellor. It is valuable as many parents did not know how to direct their children to attend the guidance service if they were experiencing personal or social problems. One parent suggested "*if my children had anything wrong I would have sent them first to the form teacher I suppose, and then to the Year Head*". A Year Head was seen by one parent as *"not really a guidance role"* and is more of a "*discipline role*" so some students may not find them easily approachable.

The parents also referred to the mentoring system where 6th year students are mentored by teachers. This system involves students meeting intermittently with their mentoring teacher or "*just catching [the student] on the corridor*" (Parent). One parent reported that this mentoring system had been the first point of contact for their child for initiating a referral to the Guidance Counsellor. Another parent stated her daughter had been "*delighted with the teacher she got*", but "*a friend of hers wasn't so happy…so you can be lucky you click with the teacher you get*" (Parent). One of the parents noted that "*the third years have to fill in a CAO form and were mentored by the sixth years this year*" (Parent), something that another parent noted their child did not benefit from.

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The parents also identified a number of other whole school initiatives which are aligned with the careers guidance aspect of guidance provision such as the Whole School Guidance Programme, the HE access programme and Speed Careers. Some of the parents who had participated in Speed Careers had a few uncertainties about it. One parent suggested that the students were "*a bit young to actually take in all the knowledge*" and did not "*know whether they're really probing because they get only six questions*" (Parent). Another felt that this programme was "*very much a taster*" (Parent).

5.4.2.2 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SCHOOL GUIDANCE SERVICE

The second theme addressed parents' engagement with the school guidance service including accessing the Guidance Counsellor, availability of information related to guidance provision, and the workload of the Guidance Counsellor and its impact on their interactions with the guidance service.

The parents are familiar with the Guidance Counsellor and held a positive view of the role. They all indicated they had seen or met the Guidance Counsellor at some stage and one parent suggested that the Guidance Counsellor was "*very visible and…high profile in the school*" (Parent). The parents also indicated that "*the kids would know*" and feel they could approach the Guidance Counsellor (Parent). However, there appeared to be a lack of regular contact between the parents and the Guidance Counsellor. Some of this may stem from them being unaware of what is taking place in the school. One parent stated, "*there's a lot of stuff that's going on in schools that parents don't know about".* Another commented that "*we go to parent teacher meetings with teachers about every other subject, but we never have a parent teacher thing about guidance or the person or the career*". Some parents suggested that there was a lack of prearranged formal opportunities to meet with the Guidance Counsellor while others have found the Guidance Counsellor to be very accessible in an informal way. These parents reported that they had initiated contact or requested an appointment with the Guidance Counsellor. This might mean that some children may "*miss out*" if parents are unwilling or unable to contact the Guidance Counsellor those parents that "*don't get involved*" (Parent).

In general, the parents appeared to be unclear as to how the guidance service provided one-to-one guidance counselling to their children. For example, one parent believed students had "*an hour's appointment or whatever with the career guidance*" (Parent). Other parents believed that not all students have a one-to-one appointment for career guidance and that "*unless you have an issue*" students mostly only interact with the guidance service during classes in 6th year or TY (Parent). This surprised some parents who felt that it "*would be bad*" if their child got through school without receiving a one-to-one guidance session (Parent). Another parent commented that this model of guidance counselling provision appears to be "*all problem driven*" and the Guidance Counsellor might not intervene "*as long as it appears to be sailing, and that's what scares me about it*" (Parent). With regard to students seeking appointments one parent questioned whether some of the younger aged students in the school would feel able to approach the Guidance Counsellor given the lack of direct contact with them Junior Cycle by the Guidance Counsellor. In contrast, the TY and 6th year students who have more regular contact might find it easier to request an appointment.

Some of the parents expressed a desire to be included in the career guidance session with their child and the Guidance Counsellor, "*one of the things that I would love for that consultation is for me to be at it*" (Parent). One parent felt her presence would be a support to her child in making "*a better life decision*". Conversely, another parent cautioned that some parents might "*dictate"* their own choices resulting in students opting for *"what mom and dad will want",* so there needs to be "*a balance*". However, some parents felt that the level of guidance provision is problematic as it appears to rely on guidance classes compared to individual appointments with students.

Many of the parents indicated that one of their main sources of information is their children. The parents acknowledged that students appear to get good information about completing the CAO or applying for SUSI grants but "*most parents don't know, they don't have a clue how to*" (Parent). However, according to one parent they "*get the least amount of information from [their own] child"*, who they feel "*filter*" information to their parents. For example, one parent reported that they were getting very stressed about whether their child was correctly completing their CAO form in time for the submission deadline. Sometimes parents feel they have insufficient information for making important applications, such as financial support, or to support their children in ways that are necessary leaving the Guidance Counsellor alone to "*follow up*" with students (Parent). Nonetheless, one parent recounted how her son was given great support in school regarding the SUSI grant application and the school "*kept on after [the students] to make sure that they were either looking that the HEAR and DARE as well*", which contributed significantly to the workload of the Guidance Counsellor (Parent). This parent commented that as many parents are unfamiliar with the application procedures and deadlines the guidance service was effective in supporting students. Access to information by parents about career guidance, the CAO and other matters related to guidance counselling includes "*informal pick-up*" approaches such as "*talking to other mothers usually who have children*" (Parent). Parents of older children are very valuable sources of information. Other parents talked about "*Googling, but it's that whole thing to know because the web is so wide*" (Parent).

A number of the parents acknowledged that the case school does provide information to parents through more formal channels but there is no "*parent teacher meeting*" with the Guidance Counsellor. As one parent commented "*I can go on the website and look up the syllabus for other things but I don't know I could do that actually*" for guidance counselling. Another parent contradicted this by indicating that guidance related information is uploaded on to the school's website in the "*parent's page*" (Parent). In other words, while the Principal may tell parents that "*well that's already there or we already do that*", they are unsure where they should go to access guidance related information or upcoming guidance related events.

The issue of the workload of the Guidance Counsellor was highlighted in the focus group with some parents perceiving that a busy Guidance Counsellor "*who is always in a hurry and busy*" might contribute to the problem of accessing information (Parent). Another parent suggested that it might also result in students "*missing out*", especially when parents are not engaged. One parent suggested that they knew of other schools that employ "*two or three people*" doing the same job, "*one doing career guidance and one doing maybe junior counsellor and maybe one doing senior counsellor for the older students*". The parents seemed to be aware of the Budget 2012 re-allocation with one stating that "*career guidance was one of the things that was hammered in the budget when the cuts came out*".

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5.4.2.3 PARENTS ROLE IN A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

The final theme concerns the parent's role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. The parents appeared to be very committed to supporting their children in making their career choices and completing the CAO forms for applications to college. Some, however, reported addressing this with their children but these "*conversations don't refer to the Guidance Counsellor or career guidance in school*" (Parent). One parent reported that their children had not "*had the conversation …with the Guidance Counsellor*" but have had the conversation multiple times at home:

> We would have lots of conversations…like "*well what would you like to do and why don't you talk to [the Guidance Counsellor]about that*" I suppose I don't think to suggest… but I suppose you'd just comment … "*you've got to start thinking about what you'd like to do, if you were to imagine yourself at 25 what do you think you'd like to be doing*. (Parent)

However, due to deficits in information on college courses and the CAO form, these career conversations can be difficult to navigate. One parent wondered if it is "*the role of the Guidance Counsellor to educate the parents as well?*" The boundary between parental support and the support their children receive from the school guidance service is a challenge for some parents:

> Knowing a bit about what your role is as a parent or what [the guidance service] expect from you or what we'd like to see you do or how you would support us. Would be very helpful. (Parent)

According to the parents, while there are some information events for parents in the school, they are often not clearly advertised. Parents also referred to difficulties in accessing relevant information about career guidance events or resources on the school website. One parent suggested that the use of a guidance service calendar across the school year would provide them with information such as what deadlines needed to be met for application (e.g. CAO). The parents were aware that Senior Cycle students are being given a lot of information about a wide range of courses and being asked to make very important choices, often by themselves. A number of parents recalled that their children did not know what they wanted to do, which made supporting them with their future education and career decisions more difficult as "*there's a lot of pressure on the kids to pick something. And they actually don't genuinely don't know what they want to do. And that's a huge pressure*". (Parent)

Finally, some of the parents felt there is potential for greater collaboration between the guidance service and the school's Parent's Council, especially in relation to sharing important information. It was proposed that the Guidance Counsellor could disseminate information through the Parent's Council to "*deliver to the parent body on [the Guidance Counsellor's] behalf*", thus further reducing the workload of the Guidance Counsellor. (Parent)

This concludes the findings from the focus group with parents. Whilst the findings suggest that the school guidance service is held in very regard by the parents, contradictory understandings of guidance counselling provision emerged. The majority of the parents believe that career guidance takes precedence, especially in the Senior Cycle. There was some confusion about the personal and social domain of guidance counselling, especially in Junior Cycle. One-to-one appointments were highlighted as being very important for students, but concerns arose amongst parents as

to whether all students are accessing this type of provision. While the parents are involved in supporting their children with their decision-making and their children receive a lot of valuable careers information from the guidance service, the parents find it difficult to access information and are often reliant on their children, other parents and family members for it. Finally, the findings suggest that parents appear to have a marginal role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school at the moment and there may be scope for greater collaboration between them and the guidance service through the Parent's Council.

5.5 DATA SOURCE 4: NATURALISTIC OBSERVATIONS OF GUIDANCE ACTIVITIES

This section presents the findings from the fourth data source which was naturalistic observations in the case school, i.e. classroom guidance and SST meetings.

5.5.1 OBSERVATIONS OF GUIDANCE IN THE CLASSROOM

There were two classroom observations of guidance provision during the fieldwork. They were timetabled guidance classes delivered by the Guidance Counsellor. The first class was a 5th year LCA class which comprised eight students. The class concentrated on two discrete areas with the first section of the class focusing on identifying types of work and conducting a local area employment investigation. The second half focussed on career skills where students conducted their own career skills assessments. The class commenced with students identifying and discussing different types of work, such as full-time, part-time and voluntary. This was linked to the students own previous experiences of work and their curriculum work placements. The advantages and disadvantages of each aspect of work were discussed. Students were encouraged to give their perspectives and opinions, including sharing of future career plans or aspirations. The students then completed a job search of their local area to identify local businesses or employers who might provide different categories of jobs that had been previously discussed. Students then identified types of skills that would be beneficial in the work environment. A video was played to the students where three categories of career skills; personal, people and task were addressed. The students completed a personal career skills self-assessment to support them in identifying their current strengths and areas for further development.

The second observed class was with a group of TY students (n=25). It was delivered in a computer laboratory classroom where the students worked individually on computers. The Guidance Counsellor had access to a projector and white board at the top of the classroom but also circulated throughout the class as the students worked independently. This class focussed on students carrying out an investigation of relevant college courses using on-line resources such as Qualifax and MyTY.ie to identify a particular career they were interested in, college courses relevant to this career, and the point's requirement for the courses. Students used material covered in previous classes to construct a power-point entitled 'My Career Action Plan' which they would be presenting to the class group during a later class.

In both observed classes there were a combination of pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning utilised by the Guidance Counsellor to deliver the curriculum. In the 5th year LCA class a variety of approaches engaged students including information giving, interactive pair-work,

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computer-aided guidance, group discussion, a video from careersportal.ie and a career skills self-assessment worksheet. In the TY class computer-aided guidance was used for the majority of the class. The Guidance Counsellor also circulated amongst the students as they worked independently and interacted with them giving individualised support where necessary.

5.5.2 OBSERVATIONS OF SST MEETINGS

Observations of two SST meetings were also carried out. Both meetings followed a similar format and were attended by a multi-disciplinary team of staff. One meeting was for the Junior Cycle and the other for the Senior Cycle cohorts. Both SST meetings involved a range of staff including the Principal and Deputy Principal; staff with specialist roles such as the Guidance Counsellor Special Needs Education (SEN) Coordinator, the HSLO and the different Year Heads for each year in both Cycles. There was also a School Completion Coordinator at the Senior Cycle SST meeting who did not attend the Junior Cycle meeting.

In terms of some specific roles, the Guidance Counsellor appeared to have a multifaceted role within both SST meetings. The main role required input regarding the guidance programme within the school and the coordination of referrals to external agencies or services for students. This role is complex and involved interactions with all other members of the SST team over the course of the meetings. Another role was as a Year Head for the 1st year group, which involves responsibility for the students from the year grouping who are on the SST list for consideration in the Junior Cycle SST meeting. The role of the SEN Coordinator involves managing aspects of the special educational needs provision within the school, including coordinating assessments of students, developing individual education plans for students and providing support to teachers working with students with special education needs. The SEN Coordinator also interacts with students and their families also. The HSLO provided information regarding communications with families of students and agreements on courses of action at the SST meetings. The Principal and Deputy Principal provided information regarding management of the school and input from other departments within the school.

Both observed SST meetings followed a similar format. The Year Heads for each year maintain a list of students from their year group who have been referred for consideration by the SST. These referrals are typically routed through the school's guidance service. A five point ladder of support system is applied to rank students according to the level of support they need, with one being the lowest level while five is the highest. This list was circulated to all members of the SST ahead of the meeting and during the meeting the individual student's needs were addressed in terms of types of support to be provided.

A wide spectrum of issues experienced by students within the school was discussed in both SST meetings. One of the key issues was poor levels of attendance particularly in the case of the Senior Cycle students. There were a variety of reasons for these absences and discussions often involved input from the Guidance Counsellor and the HSLO. The particular issue often involved interaction or supports for the student's families or contact with outside agencies, such as Youthreach or Jigsaw. A number of student issues were related to behavioural incidents or problems within school, such as anti-social behaviour and bullying behaviour. However, unlike the absences related issues, disciplinary or internal intervention procedures within the school were a more probable outcome.

A second issue related to a range of SEN diagnoses of different students within the school. While the particular diagnoses differed from one student to the next, there were a number of common challenges that brought these students to the attention of the SST including difficulties with academic attainment, socialisation and isolation within school, and mood or anxiety problems. In these situations, the SEN Coordinator often had significant input although both the Guidance Counsellor and HSLO were often involved too. Additionally, there are ongoing assessments associated with these students, with detailed discussions regarding within-school support programmes, such as social skills groups or a buddy system that might support the particular needs of the student.

A third issue related to students who were experiencing serious personal or social/ emotional challenges, such as symptoms of depression, high levels of anxiety or other mood related problems. There were also students who were having serious family or home related problems, students experiencing bullying or other interpersonal problems. These discussions were often conducted with a high level of input from the Guidance Counsellor and the HSLO. In some cases, the Year Heads were also in regular contact with the particular student to "check in" or provide intermittent support. This was particularly the case in the Senior Cycle SST meeting where some Year Heads were in contact with the parents. There were also regular references to referrals for these students to outside agencies for additional supports as deemed necessary including the local HSE CAMHS team and Jigsaw. This concludes the findings from the naturalistic observations which provide a snapshot of the types of guidance related activities that the Guidance Counsellor and school staff are involved in within a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

5.6   CONCLUSION OF PRIMARY FINDINGS

This section has presented the findings from across the four data sources. The conclusions are that the majority of participants who were drawn from across the different categories of stakeholders believe that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. Both the Guidance Counsellor and the school management highlighted the importance of support from school management for the implementation of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school. They believe that whole school initiatives such as the Whole School Guidance Programme and the SST structure are vital to supporting guidance provision. Nonetheless, a range of differences in guidance provision between the Junior and Senior Cycle are apparent in the case school. Both current and past students referred to a strong emphasis in the school on academic achievement and progression to HEI's following the Leaving Certificate compared to further education options. Finally, it was recognised across all of the participants in the study that the Guidance Counsellor has an extensive workload. While many participants complimented the effort of the guidance service in its provision of guidance to students in the case school, some staff members and parents suggested that the communication process could be improved. Some of the specific challenges identified may be as a direct result of the re-allocation of guidance resources within the school since Budget 2012.

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Section 6
Discussion of
Case Study Findings

This section presents a synthesised discussion of the case study findings which are drawn from the primary data (survey, individual interviews, focus groups and naturalistic observations), secondary data (documentary sources) and the literature reviewed in Section 4. The overall findings are discussed through the lens of the five research questions underpinning this single case study:

i) How is a whole school approach to guidance counselling delivered within the post-primary voluntary sector in Ireland?

ii) How is a whole school approach to guidance counselling carried out within one voluntary school?

iii) What is the nature of guidance counselling (personal and social, educational and career) provision within the voluntary school?

iv) What are the perceptions of key stakeholders of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the voluntary school?

v) How has the DES Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance provision impacted on a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the voluntary school?

The overall findings will be critically discussed under the three overarching themes that emerged in the case study:

1) A Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling in the Case School

2) Guidance Counselling Provision in the Case School

3) Delivering a Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling in the Case School: Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN THE CASE SCHOOL

In recent years Irish education policy in the post primary sector (Government of Ireland 1998; DES, 2005a; 2012) reflects a paradigm shift towards a 'whole school' responsibility in the form of a cross-curricular approach. This has materialised through various curricular and policy initiatives including literacy and numeracy (DES, 2011), student wellbeing (DES, 2013a,b; 2016a) and the establishment of SST's (DES, 2014). Within this context, the provision of guidance counselling is now viewed as a whole school concern (DES 2005a; 2012, 2013a). The policy directions related to wellbeing incorporate personal and social, educational and career guidance, social, personal and health education, physical education, civics social and political education (DES, 2016a; Hearne and Gavin, 2014; IGC, 2008; NCGE, 2004; Seed, 1992). In addition, since the Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance provision schools have been given greater autonomy to prioritise their available resources to maintain appropriate guidance counselling provision to students (DES, 2012, 2016b).

With regards to this explanatory single case study of one voluntary post-primary school the findings suggest complex and sometimes different understandings of a whole school approach to guidance counselling amongst stakeholders. In the context of the radical re-allocation of guidance counselling resources in 2012 (DES, 2012) a renewed emphasis on a whole school approach has been proposed as a means by which schools can maximise their resources for the delivery of guidance counselling and maintain appropriate guidance provision to students (ACCS et al., 2012). It could be argued, however, that the recent changes to the allocation of hours and delivery of guidance counselling provision needs to be considered, not only in relation to their impact on guidance counselling specifically, but also within the wider context of the Irish post-primary education system. As schools are complex organisations the relevance of school culture and norms (Fullan, 1993) needs to be considered in a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Goodson, 2001; McCoy et al., 2006). A school's culture is constantly constructed and shaped as staff members interact with each other, with students and with the wider school community (Finnan, 2000). School culture factors and the values and awareness of school management can also influence how guidance is delivered within a school setting (McCoy et al., 2006; McKenna et al., 1997). Recent research has reported that 78% of schools have altered guidance services following the 2012 re-allocation of ex-quota guidance provision (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2016; JMB 2012; NCGE, 2013; TUI, 2014). These changes appear to have had a particular impact on individual guidance counselling with the ASTI (2013) reporting reductions in provision in 70% of participating schools. Overall, these policy developments may further contribute to the previous noted discrepancies in the provision of guidance counselling in schools (DES, 2009; McCoy, et al., 2006).

With regard to the case school, school management and the Guidance Counsellor were in mutual agreement that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in place. There was also a general consensus that this approach involves the whole school community as well as the Guidance Counsellor. Guidance counselling provision to students across the curriculum is primarily executed through the school's Whole School Guidance Programme, the SST structure and the professional activities of the Guidance Counsellor within the school's

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guidance allocation. The findings from the staff survey indicate that 63% of respondents perceive that there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling involving a number of key stakeholders. In contrast, 36% of survey respondents stated that there is not a whole school approach to guidance counselling. In the context of these differing responses, 88% of the survey respondents were unaware of the presence of the School Guidance Plan. Given the importance of a Guidance Plan in the communication of roles and responsibilities within the whole school, this might account for the divergent perceptions amongst staff regarding a whole school approach to guidance counselling. The Guidance Counsellor confirmed that a staff committee in the case school had been convened to develop the School Guidance Plan a number of years ago, but that the Plan may now need to be updated.

Another potential explanation for the conflicting findings amongst staff in the case school may be due to different understandings of the aims and scope of guidance counselling provision. According to the DES (2005a) holistic guidance counselling involves personal and social, educational and career guidance. In the case school the Guidance Counsellor stated that guidance provision is "*split down the middle*" between career guidance and personal/ social guidance related to student wellbeing. However, the survey respondents differed in their understandings of the priorities of guidance counselling, with some specifying career guidance related to objectives such as college course choices through the CAO system and careers information as having a greater priority. By comparison, others suggested a focus on objectives related to supporting student wellbeing or personal counselling for students.

The utility of affective approaches to augment student cognitive and emotional development within a blended whole school approach is now well recognised (Barnes et al., 2011). Affective education can be defined as the component of the educational process that concerns itself with students' attitudes, beliefs and emotions (Best et al., 1983). Echoing the guidance delivery framework developed by the ACCS et al. in 2012 the school management in the case school emphasised that the linking and coordinating role of the Guidance Counsellor with other members of staff through the school's Whole School Guidance Programme and SST structure was vital. From the perspective of the Principal, personal and social and career guidance counselling are interlinked due to the impact student wellbeing has on motivation for academic achievement and progression. The role of the Guidance Counsellor within the case school, therefore, is to support a more holistic approach to the learning needs of students. Furthermore, the Principal perceived the role of the Guidance Counsellor as quite significant in relation to the education process being adopted across the school.

Guidance counselling is viewed as increasingly important in raising student's aspirations, challenging stereotypes and broadening horizons across schools (Barnes et al., 2011). The role of the guidance counsellor can thus have an impact on the curriculum that students "receive", both in explicit curricular content and in the "hidden curriculum" messages transmitted in how schools operate (Barnes et al., 2011, p.59). School value systems are more likely to support the development of a holistic view of student learning when such a perspective can also be shown to support "technicist" aspirations of academic excellence, educational aspiration and ambition that can also promote success in terminal exam settings (Barnes et al,. 2011). From the perspective of both the Principal and the Deputy Principal, the purpose of guidance counselling

in the school is also to develop awareness amongst teachers regarding the importance of relationships and student wellbeing in supporting teaching and learning within the case school.

There is support for the involvement of teachers in pastoral care provision and guidance related decision making within a whole school approach to enhance the role of the guidance counsellor (DES. 2012; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Lam and Hui, 2010; Teach First, 2015). However, while some research has suggested that personal and career counselling may be blended effectively within an integrated approach (Rak and O'Dell, 1994), others have cautioned against too broad a role description for guidance counsellors impacting on quality of provision (Sultana, 2004). Indeed, the IGC (2008) has previously critiqued frameworks for whole school guidance counselling provision that do not consider the specialist training and practice elements of the guidance counsellor's role, such as the counselling domain. Previous research has suggested students in post-primary school are confused regarding differentiating between the terms *guidance counselling, guidance* and *counselling* (DES, 2009; Hayes and Morgan, 2011; McCoy et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2014). The greater involvement of a range of staff in pastoral care and support roles can lead to a lack of clarity for students regarding the supports available to them within the school setting (McCoy et al., 2014). This obstacle to student engagement has consistently been prevalent in Junior Cycle, and more so now in light of the impact of the 2012 re-allocation (Hearne et al., 2016; IGC, 2013, 2016; McCoy et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2014; NCGE, 2004; OECD, 2002; Smyth et al., 2015). Within the case school, some respondents to the staff survey did recognise a pastoral care role for teachers within a whole school approach to guidance counselling and a greater emphasis on school staff working collaboratively in meeting student's needs.

The NCGE (2004) have suggested greater inclusion of the student voice in the development of school Guidance Plans through such bodies as the Student Council. Whilst neither the current nor past students of the case school reported providing any type of direct input into the delivery of guidance students in both the Junior and Senior Cycle focus groups stated that they regularly approach subject teachers and Year Heads for advice or guidance, emphasising the importance of student-teacher relationships, especially in the Junior Cycle. This finding that students value their relationships with subject teachers echoes previous research that many post primary teachers now view pastoral care and student wellbeing support as an important element of their role within schools (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Lam and Hui, 2010). While the need for training to support teachers in pastoral care provision is recognised there is disagreement about the form of training required (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; McCoy et al, 2006; Teach First, 2015). For example, crisis counselling requires specialist training for effective implementation and does not form part of initial teacher education programmes. Teachers, then, are within their rights to seek advice from the guidance services for matters that are deemed outside of their own competencies (NCGE, 2004).

There has been significant debate regarding the role of the pastoral care within a more holistic educational paradigm in post primary education in recent years (Hayes and Ecclestone, 2008). This is particularly relevant to guidance counselling as it has been argued that whole school approaches to pastoral care are often interlinked with guidance and counselling (Collins and McNiff, 1999; NCCA, 2007), and both share the central aim of students' personal, social and

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emotional development (Lohrmann et al., 2008; Watkins, 1994). However, there has been some criticism within the literature regarding the role of pastoral care and the holistic perspective on education taking primacy over subject knowledge and academic attainment in schools (Hayes and Ecclestone, 2008, p.8). With regards to the case school some respondents to the staff survey highlighted that not all members of staff engaged with the whole school approach to guidance counselling, something also recognised by the school Guidance Counsellor. Both current and past students also stated that there are some teachers in the school that they considered as being unapproachable and not specifically open to discussing their personal or social needs.

The SST initiative provides schools with guidelines for the design and implementation of student support systems that "encompass a range of supports that cater for the learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs of students" (DES, 2014, p.6). According to the DES (2014) the school Guidance Plan is at the centre of the SST structure as it sets out the components of the system which includes how a range of stakeholders will contribute to the process of supporting student wellbeing (DES, 2014). The guidance counsellor is specified as a specialist member of staff who should participate in SST meetings alongside Year Heads and other specialist members of school staff, such as the SEN coordinator and HSLO. The DES (2013; 2016a) guidelines on wellbeing in post primary education are also clear that a whole school approach to supporting student wellbeing links in with both the SST structures and guidance service within the school.

The case school has a clear whole school SST structure. The SST meetings which are chaired by the Guidance Counsellor promote an inclusive, integrated and holistic system of support for students' personal, social, educational and career guidance needs. This is encouraging given that previous research has reported lower levels of collaboration among school staff with respect to guidance and support (McCoy et al., 2006). The notion of staff working collaboratively was stressed by the Principal as being central to the whole school approach to guidance provision. The SST supports accountability and transparency for staff in working together to meet the needs of students. Likewise, the Guidance Counsellor stated that the SST system is effective as it ensures that no student "*falls through the cracks*". Consequently, the Guidance Counsellor does not work in isolation; rather the Year Heads, Deputy Principal, HSLO, SEN coordinator and Guidance Counsellor work closely together to support students. This involves highlighting individual student issues or referral of students to appropriate members of staff or to an appropriate external agency such as CAMHS or local mental health support services.

Both the Junior and Senior Cycle SST meetings formed part of the naturalistic observations during the fieldwork in this case study. Each Year Head is responsible for identifying students who need additional support through the SST. A strong whole school approach to student wellbeing was evident during both SST meetings, with Year Heads interacting with school management and input being provided by a range of specialist staff, such as the HSLO and SEN coordinator. However, the Guidance Counsellor also fulfilled the role of Year Head for 1st year students, thus effectively managing two roles simultaneously. This was a concern highlighted by a number of respondents to the staff survey as it may impact on the effectiveness of

guidance counselling provision in the case school. Previous research has found that guidance counsellors are increasingly fulfilling dual roles (mainly teaching) within schools following the 2012 re-allocation. In some cases this is associated with increased levels of stress for guidance counsellors in such positions (ASTI, 2013; Connor, 2014; IGC, 2013, 2016; JMB, 2013; NCGE, 2013).

Recent international developments highlight the importance of guidance counselling provision being positioned within other curricular domains within the school (Barnes et al., 2011). An identified concern regarding the inclusion of career learning and development initiatives with school curricula more broadly is that career guidance may be seen as "everybody's and nobody's responsibility" (Barnes et al, 2011, p.70), emphasising the need for clear and transparent roles and responsibilities amongst staff. A key guidance initiative in the case school, the Whole School Guidance Programme, closely aligns with the objectives of guidance counselling provision to all year groups. The Principal believed that the Whole School Guidance Programme has had a very positive impact on how the school operates because the programme *"connects people together"* through a range of guidance activities and programmes across the curricular years. This Whole School Guidance Programme is particularly relevant to the career guidance domain with all students doing "*…something around college or goal setting"* (Guidance Counsellor). Incorporated within the Whole School Guidance Programme is the designated College Awareness Week which provides students with information and possibilities on their advancement to third level education. In essence, the school's Whole School Guidance Programme provides a strong structure for supporting career aspirations and progression and the development of leadership skills amongst students using an integrated approach for the provision of guidance counselling. Overall, the Programme particularly addresses goals relevant to career guidance provision to Junior Cycle students, which is important given recent findings regarding imbalances in provision of guidance counselling to Junior Cycle students relative to provision in the Senior Cycle (ASTI, 2013; DES, 2009; Hearne et al., 2016; IGC, 2016).

One of the specific aspects of the Whole School Guidance Programme is the Mentoring programme which the Principal identifies as being vital in building a "*culture in the school of openness and support*" to students. Saying that, some students who took part in the case study expressed concerns regarding the levels of preparation they received for mentoring and felt they did not always achieve their desired outcomes. In addition, due to the integrated nature of whole school guidance counselling provision within the school, some current students and the parents who were involved in the case study did not attribute elements of the Whole School Guidance Programme, such as the Mentoring aspect directly to the guidance service. The parents in particular were unclear as to what programmes were coordinated by the guidance counsellor or were associated with the guidance service in the case school.

Previous research has indicated that parents can support their children's career decisions (Turner and Lapan, 2002). More specifically, career-related parental support is positively associated with students' career decision-making self-efficacy (Gushue and Whitson, 2006; Lee and Mun, 2011), career self-efficacy (Restubog et al., 2010; Turner and Lapan, 2002), career expectations (McWhirter et al., 1998), career exploration (Dietrich and Kracke, 2009), career aspirations (Ma and Yeh, 2010), career identity (Dietrich and Kracke, 2009), career certainty

(Constantine et al., 2005), career-related stress (Dietrich and Salmela-Aro, 2013) and career salience (Diemer, 2007). In the case school, parents who participated in the focus group were quite explicit regarding their understanding of guidance counselling provision in the school. The majority of parents believed it focusses on career guidance, with the Guidance Counsellor's main function being to support student's decisions regarding their career decisions and college course selection through the CAO system. Some of the parents were unaware that the Guidance Counsellor occupies a role related to personal and social guidance counselling or supporting student wellbeing associating this work with SPHE teachers or a school Chaplain. In contrast, other parents reported their children had received appointments with the Guidance Counsellor in the past, while others had experience of the Guidance Counsellor making a referral to an appropriate external service on behalf of their child. Nonetheless, some parents were also vague about educational guidance provision in the case school and were particularly concerned about their lack of understanding of what is being delivered to their children by the guidance service in general within the school. It was the view of some parents that guidance counselling "*means different things in different schools*", and wondered whether there is a role for the Guidance Counsellor in educating parents about the guidance counselling service in the case school. This echoes previous research regarding parents' general lack of knowledge of guidance counselling provision in post primary schools (McCoy et al., 2006; NGF, 2007).

Finally, with regard to students perceptions, although neither current nor past students of the case school are familiar with the term 'whole school approach' to guidance counselling, generally they recognised that a range of school staff, including the Guidance Counsellor, play a role in supporting them with personal, educational and career related decisions. This echoes literature on the important role for school staff in supporting the holistic needs of students (Best, 1990; Lodge and Watkins, 1997). Nonetheless, both current and past and students and parents of the case school only associated the provision of guidance counselling specifically with activities delivered directly by the Guidance Counsellor rather than delivered by other members of staff. This phenomenon appears to be most pronounced in the Junior Cycle, where students have very little direct contact with the Guidance Counsellor.

6.2 GUIDANCE COUNSELLING PROVISION IN THE CASE SCHOOL

According to the OECD (2004) the ways in which governments fund career guidance has a significant impact upon the nature and quality of guidance services. Since the Budget 2012 re-allocation the delivery of guidance counselling services has been re-conceptualised in Irish post-primary schools due to resource decisions by school management (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2016). While the 2016 DES Circular proposes an additional 300 posts the return to the ex-quota allocation status has not been fully addressed (DES, 2016b). In the current study, the school management and the Guidance Counsellor had noted some changes to the delivery of guidance counselling within the case school in recent years. Prior to Budget 2012 there had been an allocation of 22 hours for the full-time Guidance Counsellor and an additional three hours was allocated to another Guidance Counsellor who worked on a sessional basis. Following the 2012 re-allocation the three hours were lost and only the 22 hours were preserved in spite of an increase in student numbers during this period.

A whole school approach to guidance counselling has been suggested as an organisational adjustment to maintain schools statutory requirement to provide appropriate guidance services from the Education Act (1998) whilst also providing subject teaching (ACCS et al., 2012; DES, 2012). While the Guidance Counsellor in the case school has experienced the loss of the three hours support, both the school management and the Guidance Counsellor perceived the school's DEIS status has somewhat lessened the effects of the re-allocation as DEIS schools maintained an allocation of 18.25 hours for guidance counselling in Budget 2012 (DES, 2012). It is worth noting, that the Principal viewed the maintenance of this level of guidance counselling provision as "*a management decision*" and stated that other principals may not place the same level of value on guidance counselling provision following the 2012 re-allocation, especially in schools that do not have a DEIS designation. School culture factors and the values of school management do influence how guidance is delivered within a school setting in Ireland (ASTI, 2013; McCoy et al., 2006; McKenna et al., 1997). There is also evidence that highlights the importance of support from school management as to how education initiatives are implemented within school settings, such as the TY programme (Jeffers, 2010) and the LCA programme (Gleeson et al., 2002).

Differences in approaches to guidance counselling provision have previously been noted across the post primary sector (McCoy et al., 2006) and greater school autonomy in the allocation of hours toward guidance counselling following 2012 may further contribute to this phenomenon (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2016; TUI, 2014). Recent research also suggests there has been a change in the way guidance counsellors work with students in post primary schools (IGC, 2013, 2016; NCGE, 2013), with reductions in access to one to one counselling and personal and social guidance counselling being noted since the 2012 re-allocation (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2016). The function of the School Guidance Plan as a means of including contributions from a range of stakeholders in a whole school approach to guidance counselling has been repeatedly emphasised (DES, 2005a, 2012; NCGE, 2004). It is the specific responsibility of the school Guidance Counsellor in the case school to ensure that the School Guidance Plan, which involves the wider school community, is developed and maintained on a yearly basis. The current School Guidance Plan needs to be updated as there have been a lot of changes in the way guidance counselling provision is delivered in recent years. While 12% of respondents to the staff survey were aware of its existence, 88% were oblivious to it. Furthermore, 20% of survey respondents indicated that they did not know who should be involved in developing the School Guidance Plan. These findings need to be considered in the context of the levels of engagement across the staff community within the case school to a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

The issue of imbalance in the levels of guidance counselling provision between Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle in post primary schools has been consistently reported (DES, 2009; Hearne et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2014). This was a concern highlighted in the DES Subject Inspection (Guidance) report in the case school, with recommendations to address this imbalance in provision put forward at the time. A number of stakeholders such as parents, current and past students of the case school also believed that there is some disparity in guidance provision where direct guidance provision and activities are disproportionately

directed towards the Senior Cycle at the moment. Indeed, Both Junior and Senior Cycle students in the study perceived less contact and a lack of direct provision by the Guidance Counsellor in the Junior Cycle. Students also reported some differences in how they interacted with the Guidance Counsellor between the Junior and Senior Cycle. There are no timetabled classes with the Guidance Counsellor for students in the Junior Cycle, and they see the focus of guidance counselling provision as personal and social more so. By comparison, the students see a greater focus on career guidance in the Senior Cycle, with TY, LCA and 6th year students having regular career guidance classes with the Guidance Counsellor. A number of the parents reported being unaware of the Guidance Counsellor having contact with Junior Cycle students and believe that contact with students only commences "*when the serious stuff*" (Parent) starts in the Senior Cycle.

The school management and the Guidance Counsellor concurred with the issue about imbalance in provision in the curriculum in the case school which they attribute to the differing needs of the Junior and Senior Cycle student cohorts. This view is also reflected by respondents to the staff survey. According to 77% of the respondents counselling is the most important aspect of guidance counselling provision in the Junior Cycle. Both personal and social guidance was also indicated as important aspects of guidance counselling provision in the Junior Cycle by 59% of respondents while advice was indicated as important by 50% of respondents. This was followed by educational development, which was identified by 36% respondents, and to a lesser extent information provision (32%) and assessment (27%). In contrast, 91% of survey respondents rated the provision of information as equally important as counselling provision for Senior Cycle students. This is followed by career transitions (86%), educational development (68%), provision of advice (64%), personal and social guidance (50%) and assessment (32%). The parents also concurred with the view that the guidance counselling needs of Junior Cycle students may differ from that of Senior Cycle students, with particular emphasis being placed by parents on the role of the guidance service in preparing students for the Leaving Certificate and making course choices through the CAO system.

As stated in Section 6.1 school management and the Guidance Counsellor referred to the importance of the established Whole School Guidance Programme and its various initiatives' in meeting the guidance needs of the Junior Cycle students. The Whole School Guidance Programme also provides a framework for participation of staff, parents and the external community in aspects of a whole school approach to guidance counselling. It also focuses on inculcating further education and college awareness, increasing educational aspirations to progress after the Leaving Certificate, and developing mentoring skills amongst students. This is particularly targeted at 2nd year students. For example, Friendship Week is important for addressing issues relevant to personal and social guidance. Both the current and past students agreed that these types of initiatives were particularly important during the Junior Cycle when students had limited contact with the Guidance Counsellor. Some students developed close and supportive personal relationships with other teachers in the school which helped with accessing advice, support and guidance for a range of educational issues. This finding is reflected in past research that found students in post-primary schools develop strong supportive relationships with subject teachers (Hearne and Galvin, 2014). However, these elements of the teacher's role also entail a significant time commitment to meet student's needs (Hearne and Galvin, 2014).

Current research has suggested that personal counselling is a key aspect of guidance counselling provision which has been greatly reduced across Irish post-primary schools since the 2012 re-allocation (ASTI, 2013; Hearne et al., 2016; IGC, 2013, 2016; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). Findings from a recent case study on guidance counselling provision in an Irish post primary school suggests that the relational aspects of guidance counselling may be becoming diluted in favour of more didactic class-room based pedagogical approaches to provision (Hearne et al., 2016). As the workload and case numbers for guidance counsellors is increasing, student's ability to access one-to-one guidance counselling appointments appears to becoming more difficult (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2016). A holistic model of guidance counselling provision is delivered in the case school within the 22 hours allocation. However, the Guidance Counsellor acknowledged that a high workload and time constraints mean meeting student demands for personal counselling is a constant challenge. The Principal recognised that there is a high demand for personal guidance counselling due to a complex array of needs amongst students because of the schools DEIS status. Personal counselling is available to students across all year groups in the school according to demand. Both the current and past students were aware that personal guidance counselling is provided by the Guidance Counsellor on request but only some of them had sought it. The current and past students stated that the Guidance Counsellor is very approachable and open to scheduling appointments for one-to-one sessions. They found the sessions useful, whether for personal issues or for receiving a referral to an external agency. While students used informal ways of making contact initially, all students found the Guidance Counsellor was very "*professional*" and *"structured"* in the sessions.

In this case study, all of the students who took part were cognisant of the Guidance Counsellor's significant workload but in spite of this commended the level of support provided to them. One-to-one appointments were most likely to be instigated by the students themselves using informal methods. Nonetheless, the Senior Cycle and past students stated that the timetabled classes with the Guidance Counsellor provided the right conditions to develop a relationship with the Guidance Counsellor and request an appointment if needed. Some of the past students stated that initiating direct contact with the guidance counsellor during the earlier years of the Junior Cycle would help students develop a relationship with the Guidance Counsellor, thus making them more likely to seek support and one-to-one appointments if required.

Given that educational guidance is concerned with supporting student decisions regarding educational options and learning difficulties (DES, 2004; Liston, 2011; NCGE, 2004; Savickas, 2011) the level of engagement between the guidance counsellor and the Junior Cycle students may have an impact on student subject selection. Some of the Senior Cycle students in the focus group noted that educational guidance was *"non-existent"* during the Junior Cycle, implying they had minimal contact with the Guidance Counsellor prior to their selection of subjects for the Senior Cycle. The main sources of advice or support for making subject choices were subject teachers or family members. Conversely, some of the past students sought support from the Guidance Counsellor with their subject choices, which they found effective but these interactions were initiated by the students themselves. Some of the past students made choices based on the subjects they were already good at rather than considering which subjects might be useful for future career choices or interests. Some of the Senior Cycle students and past students recalled classes provided to them by the Guidance Counsellor on study skills and exam preparation, but were in disagreement whether there was one class or a series of classes.

Career guidance in post primary focuses on supporting student decisions regarding occupations or work roles (NCGE, 2004). It aims to bring about self-responsibility in students to develop their own lifelong career management skills (CMS), a concept that has now become central to policy discourse (Council of the European Union, 2008; ELGPN, 2012). The provision of career guidance in the case school appears to be a central aspect of guidance counselling provision, especially with Senior Cycle year groupings. In relation to 6th year, guidance classes are focussed on applying to college, accessing supports such as HEAR and DARE, and learning about the SUSI application system. Both the current and past students appeared satisfied with the content and delivery of these classes. Some guidance is also provided on alternative options such as Post Leaving Certificate courses and apprenticeships. The guidance classes with 5th and 6th year LCA students focus more on developing work skills, local area job searches and align with work experience aspects of the TY curriculum. The CAT assessment is carried out with 5th year students. While the Guidance Counsellor had been able to conduct one to one career guidance interviews with all 5th year and 6th year students in past years, the recent increased workload has meant that some 5th year interviews may not always be delivered by the Guidance Counsellor. On occasion, some of these interviews had been undertaken by a trainee guidance counsellor during their practice placement in the school. Finally, the TY students also have timetabled careers classes which focus on Curriculum Vitae development, interest trees and course selection in the CAO system and tie in closely with students work experience placements.

A key theme that emerged in this case study is the strong emphasis on high academic achievement and progression to third level across both the Junior and Senior Cycle in the case school. Gleeson and Ó Donnabháin (2009) have previously commented on the impact of narrow definitions for education provision with the focus on summative terminal exams or teachers focussing on their own subject domain to the exclusion of a more holistic view of education. For the parents in the study, progression to third level is an important outcome of engaging with the school guidance service. Current and past students stated that some teachers placed a high workload on students with a particular focus on achievement in summative state exams. However, some of the students in the case school perceived that this pressure regarding academic achievement comes from all staff within the school. Some students also suggested that the foregrounding of progression to third level and the acquisition of points has an impact on how the school prepares students for the Leaving Certificate, with a strong emphasis on students maximising points for CAO applications.

While this message about progression to third level was not exclusively attributed by the students to the school guidance service, some of them believed that as the Guidance Counsellor is "*a strong presence*" in the school many of the messages communicated by the Guidance Counsellor were similar to ones they regularly hear from their teachers (PS 3). These messages were seen by both the Junior and Senior Cycle students as being expressed both explicitly and implicitly in the case school. The students outlined a range of explicit messages that they received regarding achieving high levels of academic achievement and progressing to higher education following the Leaving Certificate. Examples of explicit messages are the content of

guidance classes in TY and 6th year focusing on the CAO system and the choice of third level courses, which one Senior Cycle student described as a focus on "*college, college, college*". One example of an implicit message is the *Fame Wall* which displays portraits of students who have progressed to third level education. Another example relates to the type of careers information provided to students about alternative progression routes post Leaving Certificate. According to some of the Junior and Senior Cycle students, the majority of information provided by the guidance service relates to progression to HEI's compared to Post Leaving Certificate courses or the apprenticeship system. This may necessitate students having to research alternative options by themselves.

6.3   DELIVERING A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GUIDANCE COUNSELLING IN CASE SCHOOL: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Although a whole school approach to guidance is often promoted in policy its rationale is complex (Lam and Hui, 2010). The findings from this case study suggest there is a holistic model of guidance counselling provision in the case school which aims to deliver the three domains of guidance counselling within an integrated whole school approach to students. This style of delivery impacts on the roles and responsibilities of a range of stakeholders within and outside of the case school. In line with the NCGE (2004) and DES (2005a, 2012) a number of stakeholders were identified by survey respondents as being involved in a whole school approach including the Guidance Counsellor; the Principal; Deputy Principal; Year Heads; teachers; support staff; students; parents; siblings and peers, the school chaplain; the resource teachers and HSLO and BOM. This final section will address the roles and responsibilities of a range of stakeholders involved in the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school; namely the DES, Guidance Counsellor, school management, school staff, students and parents.

One of the key stakeholders that have influenced the evolution of guidance counselling provision in Irish post-primary schools in recent years has been the DES (DES, 2005a,b; 2009; 2012, 2016b). The role of the guidance counsellor has also been specified in a number of recent whole school policy documents including the *Action Plan on Bullying* (DES, 2013b), the *Wellbeing in Post-Primary School Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (DES, 2013a), and the *Student Support Teams* (DES, 2014). The most recent initiative is the *Wellbeing* strand in the proposed Junior Cycle curriculum which will incorporate physical education, relationships and sexuality, anti-bullying programmes, civic and political education and guidance (DES, 2016a). However, it is still unclear as to what constitutes 'appropriate guidance' as specified in the Irish Education Act (1998). The OECD (2002) has suggested this lack of clarity may lead to confusion regarding the boundaries of the guidance counsellor's role across schools and has left significant scope for divergent local interpretations of 'appropriate guidance' in line with particular value systems or school ethos (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2016; NCGE; 2013; TUI, 2014).

There have been a number of attempts to address the issue of 'appropriate guidance' by clarifying the boundaries of the role of the guidance counsellor within a whole school approach to guidance counselling (Hayes and Morgan, 2011; IGC, 2008; NCCA, 2007; NGF, 2007). The DES (2005a) views the role of the guidance counsellor as being wide and varied while supporting students with their personal, social, educational and vocational needs. In the absence of explicit direction from the DES on the boundaries of guidance counselling provision, the NCCA (2007) proposed strategy for the integration of a range of curricular experiences within the formal structure of the curriculum was viewed as inadequate (IGC, 2008). A guidance service model that positions the guidance counsellor at the centre coordinating provision whole school guidance provision has been recommended (IGC, 2008; NCGE, 2004).

The role of the guidance counsellor within a whole school approach to guidance counselling may sometimes be misconstrued as the whole school guidance service (Liston, 2011). With regards to the Guidance Counsellor's role in the case school, the school appears to be honouring the terms of the 1998 Education Act by providing guidance counselling to students across the three domains of guidance, i.e. personal and social, educational and career (DES, 2005a; IGC, 2008; NCGE, 2004; NGF, 2007). The Guidance Counsellor in the case school has a full allocation of 22 hours per week for guidance provision. This is divided across the three domains of guidance counselling through a combination of co-ordinating activities (Whole School Guidance Programme and SST), one-to-one guidance counselling and classroom guidance. The scheduled guidance classes are only delivered to the Senior Cycle students and focus mainly on career guidance or issues related to post Leaving Certificate progression for students. There are no scheduled guidance classes in the Junior Cycle. The Guidance Counsellor is responsible for the development of a yearly School Guidance Plan which is informed by relevant DES circulars (2005b, 2012, 2016b). The Guidance Counsellor is also responsible for coordination of cross curricular activities in collaboration with other staff in the school and also coordinates referrals to external agencies according to student needs.

Although the NCCA (2007, p.3) claimed that the guidance counsellor has "primary responsibility for the delivery of the school's guidance and counselling service" there appears to be a lack of clarity on the exclusive role and responsibilities of the guidance counsellor and what aspects of the guidance service are areas of shared responsibility schools. In the case school parents and both current and past students were unclear regarding what constituted the discrete role of the Guidance Counsellor and what is being delivered by other staff members as part of the school's guidance service. The role of the Guidance Counsellor in the case school involves working in collaboration with a range of other staff and linking resources available in the school (i.e. staff, skills, training) to meet student needs. Both the Principal and the Guidance Counsellor compared this approach to former practice in the school where guidance provision had focused more on the counselling aspect of the role and entailed less collaboration with other staff. The previous model had contributed to a lack of understanding regarding the work of the Guidance Counsellor amongst staff, students and parents. In contrast, both current and past students of the case school reported the Guidance Counsellor as "*very visible*" in the school (Senior Cycle student). Respondents to the staff survey viewed career guidance as a major focus of the Guidance Counsellor's role but there was also recognition of the personal counselling aspect of the role. However, it has been found that guidance counsellors often feel

inadequately supported in their personal counselling role in schools (Connor, 2013; Hayes and Morgan, 2011; Ryan, 1993). Although the school management in the case school recognise that the high caseload of the Guidance Counsellor is problematic, the recent introduction of the SST structure is contributing positively towards addressing student wellbeing.

A central aspect of the role of the guidance counsellor is personal guidance counselling, which has been defined as "helping students to explore their thoughts and feelings, and the choices open to them; giving care and support to students learning to cope with the many aspects of growing up" (NCGE, 2004, p.12). Disconcertingly, the IGC (2016) reports that one-to-one guidance counselling has dropped from 12.0 hours to 5.59 hours per week across a sample of 364 participating schools. This represents a significant decrease of 53.5 % in hours dedicated to this aspect of guidance counselling compared to provision prior to the Budget 2012 re-allocation (IGC, 2016). However, school management in the case school clearly recognise the importance of personal guidance counselling guidance to students, especially given the variety of needs that exist across the student groups. According to the Guidance Counsellor this is one area of provision *"that you sense the cuts have come in"* and is an area that *"loses out because of time"* constraints.

Recent policy developments have emphasised the importance of guidance counsellors making referrals to external service providers in meeting the personal needs of students (DES, 2012, 2013). While the guidance counsellor should provide personal counselling around a wide variety of issues, where the issues are deemed to be of a serious nature, the guidance counsellor should refer students to the appropriate specialised professionals (DES, 2012; NGF, 2007). Suggested causes for referral may include disclosures of suicidal ideation, addiction, sexual abuse or severe mental health issues. The Guidance Counsellor in the case school is responsible for referrals to external agencies and has developed links with a range of local specialist agencies that support young people including Jigsaw, CAMHS and Pieta House. However, consistent with previous research, referral to some services is hampered by long delays and waiting lists to access publicly funded services (Hearne et al., 2016).

The 2012 re-allocation of guidance counselling has placed the responsibility of resourcing the guidance service within a particular school firmly with school management (ACCS et al., 2012; DES, 2012; ICG, 2013, 2016). Previous research has shown that principals knowledge of guidance and counselling issues can be somewhat inadequate (McCoy et al., 2006; McKenna et al., 1997) as well as highlighting discrepancies in how guidance counselling is provided across the post primary sector (IGC, 2013, 2016; McCoy et al., 2006). In the context of the case school, both the Guidance Counsellor and school management identified the importance and significance of support from school management in providing the vision and resources to facilitate the delivery of an effective guidance service in the case school. In particular, the Principal holds an important administrative role regarding the allocation of hours for guidance counselling. The Principal is involved in the administration of all school policies, including the most recent DES policies that have a bearing on the guidance counselling delivery (DES, 2013a,b). Additionally, the Principal participates in SST meetings for both the Junior and Senior Cycles, but does not participate in any of the other academic or vocational aspects of guidance within the case school. As the Designated Liaison Person (DLP), the Principal is responsible for

child protection student referrals to external agencies. The Deputy Principal also participates and supports the SST meetings within the school, is involved in the administration of the school and provides support to the guidance service.

The importance of support from school management for guidance counselling delivery relates also to attitude formation amongst the rest of the school community and its leaders (Evans, 1996). Collaboration in working practices have been recognised across a range of recent policy documents as a key requirement going forward for guidance counselling provision within a whole school approach (ACCS, 2012; DES, 2009, 2012). According to both the Principal and Deputy Principal in the case school a whole school approach provides transparency and accountability regarding how the school operates and how guidance counselling is provided in collaboration with other members of staff. The Irish integrated model of personal and social, educational and career guidance (DES, 2005a; IGC, 1998; 2008; NCCA, 2007; NGCE, 2004) allows for significant autonomy on the part of guidance counsellors in their professional practice within Irish post-primary schools (Liston, 2011). While previous research has suggested that the personal and social or pastoral care aspects of the guidance counsellors role may lose out to competing agendas within some school settings (IGC, 2013; McCoy et al., 2006; NCGE, 2013), both the school management and the Guidance Counsellor in this case study view it as an important aspect of the Guidance Counsellor's role in the case school. Nonetheless, while the evident support for guidance counselling from school management in the case school is seen as vital for the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling, this may not be the situation in other schools.

From a policy perspective the role of teaching staff within a whole school approach to guidance counselling has been consistently emphasised in recent years (DES, 2012; IGC, 2013, NGF, 2007; Teach First, 2015). However, research suggests that issues about professional role boundaries and workload concerns for school staff have become important considerations (Gatsby Foundation, 2014; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hui, 2002). The role of the teaching staff in the case school was highlighted by both current and past students as being instrumental in the provision of advice or support for a range of issues. The students rely on well-developed teacher-student relationships to explore subject-related career options and for support on education related challenges. Both current and past students also find some subject teachers a helpful conduit for referral to the Guidance Counsellor. Some of the current students are also more likely to approach a familiar staff member rather than the Guidance Counsellor for support about a personal issue, which concurs with previous research findings that subject teachers and Year Heads play an important role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling and student wellbeing (DES, 2012, 2013a,b; Headstrong, 2015). Both current and past students are also aware of the Guidance Counsellor's high workload and busy position, citing it as another reason they rely on their personal relationships with subject teachers and Year Heads when seeking out individual support.

Research has found that many teachers believe a whole school approach can support the provision of a united staff response in the face of serious issues or problems (McCoy et al., 2006). Both the students and parents in the case study also highlighted the role of the SPHE programme in introducing students to guidance related activities at Junior Cycle. The Guidance Counsellor, however, noted that further collaboration and development between the guidance service and the SPHE department is important. Nonetheless, divergences emerged in relation to the perspectives

of survey respondents regarding their role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. While 36% of respondents to the staff survey believed there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the school, a further 16% indicated they did not know what role they played within it. Some identified their role in terms of academic subject-related guidance, while others viewed their role as one of referral to the Guidance Counsellor. Other respondents positioned their role within the SST structure as a Year Head, whilst others viewed their role as relating to the overall pastoral care of students. Additionally, some respondents identified a more general supportive role in contributing towards a positive and caring school environment. Conversely, however, two survey respondents did not know what their role is within a whole school approach to guidance counselling, while others alluded to a fragmented level of understanding and participation amongst some of their colleagues. It has been found that many teachers identify pastoral care as an important aspect of their role but reported that an inadequate amount of pastoral care training throughout their teacher training and career was a challenge in fulfilling this aspect of their role (Gatsby Foundation, 2014; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; McCoy et al., 2014). This point was echoed by the Guidance Counsellor in the case school who acknowledged that the role of teachers within a whole school approach to guidance counselling is complex and staff may need additional training to support them.

The role of students within a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school can primarily be described as 'receivers' of guidance counselling (Hearne et al., 2016). It has previously been argued that students should be facilitated to provide input and have involvement in the development of the School Guidance Plan and the delivery of guidance counselling within a whole school approach to guidance provision (NCGE, 2004). The NCGE (2004) has suggested that bodies such as the Student Council can voice student opinions on the essential elements of the guidance programme and how it is enacted within a particular school. The students in the case school do not appear to make a direct contribution to the way guidance counselling is delivered in terms of the Guidance Plan. Instead, the students viewed their role as relating to participation in guidance counselling classes in the Senior Cycle. Many current and past students confirmed that the majority of, and in some cases only, contact with Guidance Counsellor was in the classroom in either TY or 6th year. As some current and past students stated they did not have enough direct contact with the Guidance Counsellor, they believed that guidance counselling classes should be made available to students in the Junior Cycle.

Following the Budget 2012 re-allocation concerns regarding the ability of schools to deliver the personal guidance counselling aspect to students have been articulated (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2016; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). Research on student perspectives relating to guidance counselling in post primary schools has shown that young people value the personal qualities and detailed individualised information offered by the Guidance Counsellor during one-to-one sessions (McCoy et al., 2014). The Guidance Counsellor in the case school highlighted the difficulty in maintaining personal counselling provision to students and as it entailed a significant time commitment. While not all of the students involved in the case study had one-to-one appointments, those who did found the intervention beneficial. These students felt that they were effectively supported. Students also participate in a number of cross curricular initiatives through the school's Whole School Guidance Programme, such as College Awareness Week and Friendship Week.

Finally, legislation such as the Education Act (1998) enshrines the rights of parents to be considered as partners with full negotiating rights and recommends that "schools and parents ensure that at all times they work in ways that promote genuine collaboration in the best interest of the young people whose progress and wellbeing both aspire to achieve" (DES, 2006, p.132). The role of parents within a whole school approach to guidance counselling has been emphasised as being important in contributing to the career decision making process of young people (DES, 1995; McCoy et al., 2014; NCGE, 2004; NGF, 2007) and they are viewed as "integral partners in the education of their child" (NCGE, 2004, p.149). However, McCoy et al. (2014) report that, while parents are the main source of advice for students considering education and career options at school completion, they are seldom a decisive influence. The current and past students in the case school identified their parents are an important source of support and advice in making subject choices and in career choices. The Guidance Counsellor and the school management also emphasised that there is regular communication with parents regarding any concerns regarding the wellbeing of students. This aligns with recent DES propositions that parents and schools should work closely together as the mental health and wellbeing of a young person is enhanced when the young person's school and parents/guardians are working together (DES 2012; DES, 2013a). However, parents have reported previously that engaging with guidance counselling provision can be intimidating and not user friendly which contributes towards a perception of inadequate levels of provision for students (NCGE, 1996). Some parents in the case study raised concerns about the level of contact between the school guidance service and themselves. They would like greater levels of engagement with the guidance service, especially regarding information on aspects of guidance counselling provision and how they can become more involved in supporting their children as the support they do provide on career or education decisions is given completely independently of the school's guidance service. As they tend to rely heavily on their children for access to information, this can be an impediment to their engagement with the guidance service.

6.4   CONCLUSION

The overall findings of this explanatory single case study indicate that there is a strong commitment to the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the case school by management, the Guidance Counsellor and school staff. Specifically, the school management recognise the important role of guidance counselling in the promotion of a holistic and collaborative model of education and guidance to students in the school. This has been envisioned by school management and staff, in particular through the implementation of the school's Whole School Guidance Programme and the SST structure in recent years. These two initiatives provide a framework for staff to work collaboratively in the provision of whole school initiatives relevant to guidance counselling. Nevertheless, a number of challenges to the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school also emerged: the busy role occupied by the Guidance Counsellor; different levels of understanding about roles and levels of engagement of school staff in relation to whole school guidance provision; the importance of communication between the guidance service and the whole school community and the need for ongoing CPD for staff in relation to a whole school approach to guidance counselling.

Section 7
Conclusion

The overall aim of this research study was to critically examine a whole school approach to guidance counselling within the Irish post-primary sector through an explanatory single case study in one mixed-gender voluntary DEIS school. This was achieved through a number of key objectives including the production of this case study report. The explanatory single case study design was used to explore and explain how whole school guidance counselling provision is experienced by participants directly or indirectly in the specific case school (Yin, 2014). This type of case study is characterised by 'how' and 'why' research questions that investigate the relationships between different theory components or aspects of the case context within a bounded system (Yin, 2014). A mixed-methods approach to the data collection and analysis proved beneficial for providing a holistic and contextual understanding of the phenomenon (Abma and Stake, 2014; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2014) of whole school guidance counselling provision within the case school from the perspectives of six key stakeholders; the school management, Guidance Counsellor, teaching and support staff, current students, past students and parents of current students. In addition, supplementary primary data documents sourced from the case school provided contextual information to ground the study in the case site.

This single case study has explicated the specific circumstances of the provision of a guidance counselling service as a whole school activity (Abma and Stake, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011) during a particular period in Irish post primary education, i.e. from September 2014 when the new allocation emerged in practice to July 2016 when the final case report was written. The case study provides an in-depth and holistic view of guidance counselling provision in the context of an ever-changing policy, practice and research landscape between the Budget 2012 re-allocation and the partial restoration in Budget 2016. The 'whole school' paradigm is now strongly positioned within the context of ongoing educational reform in Ireland. For the last number of years, the whole school model of guidance has been viewed as an exemplary form of educational provision to meet the growing personal, social, educational and career needs of students, regardless of the lack of evidence to support this vision (ACCS, 2012; DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012; NCCA, 2007; NCGE, 2004).

In particular, this case study provides meaning and understanding of whole school guidance counselling through dialogue and engagement with relevant stakeholders in the school community (Abma and Stake, 2014; Schwandt, 2001; Stake, 2006). Some of the current challenges, issues and nuances of this type of approach including the situational nature of guidance counselling provision and the influence of internal and external contexts emerged in the findings (Abma and Stake, 2014; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The single case study method has also revealed the unique features (Yin, 2009, 2014) of the particular case school. Firstly, the school's DEIS status has helped to safeguard the provision of guidance counselling to students, notwithstanding the loss of three hours of guidance in 2012 during a period of increased student numbers. Secondly, the school's innovative use of a particular type of whole school guidance counselling in the form of its Whole School Guidance Programme provides a significant level of guidance counselling provision to students and is inclusive of a range of key stakeholders in the school community. Finally, this initiative, allied with the recently constituted school's SST structure, reflects the strong commitment of school management to preserve the guidance service which is to be commended.

Nonetheless, such structures cannot negate the need for a qualified Guidance Counsellor to manage and act as the principle agent in the delivery of the guidance service in post primary schools. The success of a whole school approach to guidance within the school system is commensurate with the sufficient allocation of guidance professionals'. This is particularly relevant in the context of the equitable provision of guidance counselling across the curriculum where there is currently an imbalance between Junior and Senior Cycle. Despite numerous research findings this continues to be an ongoing concern, not only in the case school but across the sector, and the Budget 2012 re-allocation has further exacerbated this issue (IGC, 2016). In particular, the re-allocation has had an impact on the one-to-one personal guidance counselling element of guidance as evidenced in the case school. At the moment the provision of 'Guidance in the Wellbeing' component of the new Junior Cycle Framework and the partial restoration of 300 hours in Budget 2016 may be the commencement of measures to re-instate guidance counselling in the school system (DES, 2016a,b).

Although the findings of this single case study cannot be generalised to other post primary schools, the issues that have emerged may be representative of the current situation in the sector (Yin, 2009; 2014). In choosing to concentrate on one voluntary school in a short period of time there are some limitations to this case study. It captures the situation in one school type only and further research is necessary in other types of schools such as single gender, non-DEIS, comprehensive and community, Education and Training Boards (ETB) and private schools. In addition, due to time constraints, other stakeholders as referenced by the DES (2005a) and NCGE (2004) as being important in a whole school approach were not included such as the BOM and external agencies including NEPS, Jigsaw, and CAMHS. However, the learning from this case study is that quality case study research takes time and needs buy-in from all of the stakeholders involved. In the context of developing an evidence base, case study research is also a cumulative process and it is hoped that this case study will lay some of the groundwork for future case research in the guidance counselling profession.

One of the key objectives of this research study has been to inform guidance counsellors and researchers on the necessary protocols involved in conducting transparent and ethically sound case study research in the field. There are a number of factors that need to be considered for the carrying out of empirical, rigorous and reflexive case studies. Fundamentally, it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of what case study research entails in order to choose the most appropriate type of case study design for the purposes of the specific research project. This explanatory case study involved theoretical eclecticism through a permutation of the perspectives of Yin and Stake. It is recommended that strong collaborative partnerships between the research team and the research participants are cultivated in the research. This case study required a high level of collaboration between the University of Limerick and Dublin City University research team and the case school team. This involved the creation of a set of protocols from the outset of the study and communication between the research team and the school with regards to access, sampling, data collection and respondent validation. There was also prolonged engagement by the Postdoctoral Researcher in the case school site which required regular discussions with the school team with regard to intrusion and child protection legislation within a busy school environment.

Finally, since Budget 2012 the evidence points to the erosion of one-to-one guidance counselling, increased classroom guidance, the employment of unqualified guidance staff or para-professionals, compression of classes and loss of curriculum subjects, and an increase in the crisis management of students experiencing difficulties (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013; 2016; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). Even though some of these specific issues did not emerge in this case study what is evident is that whole school guidance counselling delivery in post-primary education requires high levels of commitment and understanding from the DES, school management, guidance counsellors, teaching and support staff, students, parents and the wider school community. It also involves greater clarification of the different stakeholder's roles and responsibilities, as well as the provision of relevant and timely CPD to all school staff on the successful delivery of a comprehensive school guidance service to meet the diverse needs of students across the curriculum.

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