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'Science of the singular'; An explanatory single case study of whole school guidance counselling in Ireland.

Lucy Hearne, University of Limerick; Paul King, Dublin City University; Tom Geary, University of Limerick; Neil Kenny, Dublin City University.

Abstract:

This article will discuss the findings of a single explanatory case study on the model of whole school guidance counselling in the Irish secondary school system which was carried out during a turbulent period of policy and practice changes in the delivery of guidance counselling services to students from 2012 onwards (Simons 1980; Yin 2014). Although the case study is positioned within a single voluntary school the findings may be typical of similar secondary schools settings in Ireland and abroad. Particular focus is given to explicating the key findings of the case study through the specific themes of; conceptions of whole school guidance counselling, the Irish integrated model of guidance counselling, stakeholder roles and responsibilities, and the effect of resource re-allocations by policy makers funding guidance school services.

Keywords:
Case study; guidance counselling; whole school guidance model; secondary education; mixed methods

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Introduction

In this article the use of an explanatory single case study design to examine the phenomenon of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one Irish post primary school during a period of mandated changes to the allocation of guidance provision in the Irish Government Budget 2012 will be discussed. The study was undertaken in the context of Irish guidance policy directives that strongly advocate for more integrative approaches to guidance service delivery to meet the diverse needs of young people in the secondary school system (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2005, 2012; National Centre for Guidance in Education [NCGE], 2004). Whole school guidance provision places direct responsibility on the 'whole' school team and external stakeholders to deliver the school guidance programme

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

across the curriculum under the leadership of a professionally qualified guidance counsellor (DES, 2005, 2012; NCGE, 2004).

Whilst the evolution of the school guidance profession dates back to the 1920's and 1930's in America (Foxx, Baker & Gerler, 2017), guidance counselling only emerged within the Irish post primary education system in 1966 (Andrews, 2011; Hearne, King, Kenny & Geary, 2017). It was brought into legislation through the Irish Education Act (1998, Section 9c) which stipulates that secondary school students are entitled to access 'appropriate guidance' to support their educational and career decision-making. An integrated model of guidance counselling involves "personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance" and the two activities of guidance and counselling (DES, 2005 p.4). This unified model is quite unique compared to guidance provision in other European Union countries which tends to vary considerably in publicly funded sectors (Vuorinen & Kettunen, 2017).

However, the delivery of guidance counselling in secondary education is a contentious issue and appears to be based on particular value systems and available resources in different countries. The recently launched Careers Strategy in England proposes to address the ongoing variability in the quality of career guidance in British schools arising from previous policy decisions by engaging the education, business and public sectors in addressing the deficits in provision (Department for Education (DfE), 2017). The history of the allocation of guidance counselling resources in Irish schools bears similarity with American practice whereby it has expanded and retracted over the years commensurate with the national economic situation and the educational policy landscape (Foxx, Baker & Gerler, 2017; Hearme et al., 2017). The specific allocation of guidance on an ex-quota basis first introduced into Irish post primary schools in 1972 was one guidance counsellor to 250 students and increased to one guidance counsellor to 500 students in 1983 (Hayes & Morgan, 2011). This allocation remained unchanged until the 2012 Irish Government Budget which resulted in a re-allocation of guidance to an in-quota status, i.e. drawn from the overall teaching staff allocation granted to a school (DES, 2012). More recently, with the improving economy, efforts have been made to reverse this decision with the yearly restoration of the 600 lost posts. As of 2018, 500 of the 600 removed posts will have been re-introduced, albeit on the in-quota basis (DES, 2017).

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research study employed an explanatory single case study design to examine the phenomenon of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in one Irish secondary school post 2012. It was carried out in a single school environment, i.e. a mixed gender voluntary school. Within the Irish educational system voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed by denominational organisations, the majority of which are under Catholic patronage. Data was collected from six key stakeholders', namely; school management, guidance counsellor, school staff, past students, current students and parents of current students.

The need for more case study research in education and guidance counselling is well recognised (Bassey, 1999; Hearne et al., 2017; Kidd, 2006; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2000, 2004). Case study research can contextualise the subjective meanings in the case and establish the probable causal links in real-life interventions such as guidance counselling (Abma & Stake, 2014; Depoy & Gilson, 2008; Hearne, 2009; Williams & Dyer, 2009; Yin, 2014). For some, case study research is constituted as the "science of the singular" (Simons, 1980, p.1), conducted in naturalistic settings (Bassey, 1999) and focuses on the commonalities and particularities of the target case (Abma & Stake, 2014; Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Stake, 2000). In this case study a broad range of research methods were used to capture holistically the 'lived reality' of those operating within the case phenomenon of whole school guidance provision during a particular period in time (Bassey, 1999; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014).

Literature Review

This study was not about hypothesis testing or seeking generalisability; rather it was about developing an understanding of the particular phenomenon of whole school guidance counselling by drawing out the different perspectives of those who experienced it in one case setting. At the outset of the research study a comprehensive literature review was undertaken which informed the development of the research questions underpinning the case study. This review incorporated political, theoretical and practice based literature on the delivery of whole school guidance counselling.

Guidance is now strongly associated with educational and career transitions from school to

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

further and higher education, training and the workforce (DES 2005; European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network [ELGPN], 2012; McGuinness, Bergin, Kelly, McCoy, Smyth & Timoney, 2012). The meaning of career guidance and its delivery has been transformed in the last century as the realities of the economic and jobs market environment are in constant flux and schools now need to involve all staff in career learning activities (Barnes, Bassot & Chant, 2011; Pryor & Bright, 2017; Teach First, 2015). Due to the increased prevalence of societal issues manifesting within the school environment the focus on student wellbeing has also increased and personal counselling is an integral element of the school guidance service (DES, 2013; Dowling and Doyle, 2017; Foxx et al., 2017; Hayes & Morgan, 2011). Counselling, in this context, enables students to explore their thoughts and feelings, develop decision-making skills and coping strategies to deal with potential behavioural or personal difficulties (DES, 2005; Hayes & Morgan, 2011; NCGE, 2004).

Since 2012 the evidence from a variety of national surveys suggests that the integrated approach to guidance counselling, i.e. personal and social, educational and career, is being inconsistently applied across Irish schools with reported difficulties in maintaining appropriate services (Institute of Guidance Counsellors [IGC], 2016; NCGE, 2013). Specifically, the incapacity to meet the personal and social dimension of guidance counselling is evident in schools (Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland [ASTI], 2013; IGC, 2016; NCGE, 2013). This is during a period when students place enormous value on individual counselling (McCoy, Smyth, Watson & Darmody, 2014). Four national audits carried out between 2011 and 2016 by the national professional body representing guidance counsellors substantiate such concerns, especially with regard to the overall reduction in one-to-one counselling from 12.0 hours to 5.59 hours per week, which represents a decrease in service of 53.5% (IGC, 2016). Furthermore, there has been a 27.6%, reduction in guidance provision and increases in academic subject teaching by guidance counsellors (IGC, 2016).

The changes to the guidance allocation in Budget 2012 due to financial rationalisation mirrors previous top down educational reforms in the Irish education sector (Gleeson & Ó Donnabháin, 2009). Research on educational reform suggests that school culture and the attitude of management also play a significant role in how national reforms are practically implemented within schools (Gleeson, O'Driscoll, Clifford, Collison, Rooney & Tuohy, 2002; Jeffers, 2010; Stoll & Fink, 1996). The 2012 re-allocation designated specific powers

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

to school management to allocate teaching hours and various other student supports such as guidance counselling in schools (DES, 2012; NCGE, 2013). The developmental and personal counselling aspects of the guidance counsellor's role have become particularly vulnerable where resources have been reduced and other areas of the curriculum are deemed more privileged (IGC, 2016; NCGE, 2013). For some guidance counsellors in Irish schools this has involved being assigned subject teaching duties alongside their guidance counselling work, thus complicating and compromising the quality of guidance provision to students (IGC 2016).

Whole school guidance counselling is not a new concept and internationally the provision of a comprehensive guidance counselling programme within secondary schools has been strongly encouraged (Foxx et al., 2017; Gysbers & Henderson, 2014; Lam & Hui, 2010). Gysbers and Henderson (2014) emphasise three central elements of this type of programme: content, organisational framework and adequate resources, as well as having trained staff and sufficient resources to provide such programmes. The whole school concept has also gained considerable ground in Irish guidance policy discourse with varying terminology being used such as 'activity', 'approach', 'enterprise', 'model' (Department of Education [DE], 1992; Department of Education and Science [DES], 1995; DES, 2005, 2012; NCGE, 1998). In Ireland, the majority of post primary schools have an 'embedded' guidance service whereby guidance counselling is provided by a qualified guidance counsellor on the school staff (McLeod, 2007). However, the process of balancing the guidance curriculum while simultaneously aiming to address the individual social and personal development of students is a complicated process (Lam & Hui, 2010; Watkins, 1994). The development of the whole school model of guidance counselling is consistent with other Irish whole school policy initiatives such as literacy and numeracy, anti-bullying and student wellbeing whereby all stakeholders involved in the education of young people in post primary education have a key role to play (DES, 2011, 2013; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2017).

With regard to guidance counselling specifically, the involvement of key stakeholders such as school management, teaching and support staff, students and parents in the delivery of a whole school guidance programme and yearly guidance plan is endorsed (NCGE, 2004). A number of factors have been identified as pertinent to expediting this model including clarity

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

on the roles, responsibilities and competencies of school staff, teacher dedication and communication, and team spirit; all of which strongly suggest that local variables and resource allocations are extremely important (Hearne & Galvin, 2014; Hui 2002). However, as Foxx et al. (2017) argue, attitudes to collaboration and understanding about guidance counselling amongst the 'primary actors' such as management and staff are based on values, knowledge and competencies. In Ireland, it has been found that there are lower levels of collaboration amongst school staff, with many guidance counsellors working on their own to deliver the guidance service (Hearne & Galvin, 2014; McCoy, Smyth, Darmody & Dunne, 2006). This appears to be compounded by a certain ambiguity about the guidance counsellor's role and position and its relationship with pastoral care provision in schools, the absence of yearly guidance plans in some schools and inadequate time for staff to meet for guidance planning (Hearne et al., 2017; McCoy et al., 2006).

School guidance counsellors need to be proficient and competent in order to gain support from other significant collaborators in whole school guidance provision (Foxx et al., 2017). The design of guidance programme activities requires interrelated steps based on student need level, desired student learning, group size, counsellor competences and skills and the most effective activity component (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012). There are two strands to the Irish guidance counsellor's role: the provision of a guidance service to meet the needs of all students regarding their decision-making and transition planning, and the development of a curricular guidance programme within a whole school context (DES, 2005; IGC, 2008; NCGE, 2004). The diverse range of activities include personal, social, educational and career development programmes, guidance, information, advice, referral, networking, consultation with students, staff and parents, and co-ordinating, managing and organising curricular guidance activities (NCGE, 2004; NGF, 2007). Thus, the guidance counsellor holds a central position in terms of his or her core professional and practice competences developed from initial professional training and the continuous acquisition of knowledge and skills (IGC 2017).

Methodology

The research study utilised an explanatory single case design and a mixed methods approach to elucidate the nature of whole school guidance counselling provision within one school after the Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance provision in schools (Abma & Stake, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Research questions

The explanatory single case study design involved a detailed description of the context, boundedness and use of mixed methods to collect data from a variety of different sources to capture the complexity of the specific school setting (Yin, 2014). The research questions underpinning the case study were derived from the in-depth literature review. The main research question asked *'how is a whole school approach to guidance counselling delivered within the voluntary school sector in Ireland?'* Four secondary questions asked:

1. *What are the perceptions of key stakeholders of a whole school approach to guidance counselling within one voluntary school?*
2. *How is a whole school approach to guidance counselling being delivered within the voluntary school?*
3. *What is the nature of guidance counselling provision (i.e. personal and social, educational and career) within the voluntary school?*
4. *How has the Budget 2012 reallocation of guidance counselling impacted on a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the voluntary school?*

Numerous definitions of 'case study' have been proposed to explore and explain the complexity and uniqueness of a particular phenomenon, institution, programme or system in a bounded context (Abma & Stake, 2014; Stake, 1995, 2000; Yin, 2009, 2014). In this research the single *explanatory case study* investigated causal relationships and presented data to explain how events occur or are experienced by participants within the case (Yin, 2014). It concentrated on the particularities of the case to capture a genuine understanding of the case being researched (i.e. whole school guidance counselling) (Abma & Stake, 2014; Simons, 1980, 2009). A key consideration was the specific boundaries of the case study, i.e. context, identification of the case itself, location and time frame (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2001). The *context* was whole school guidance counselling provision in the broader Irish post primary voluntary school sector. The *case* was the phenomenon of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the post primary voluntary sector through a *unit of analysis* of one co-educational voluntary school (i.e. case site) (Yin, 2014). The time parameter of the complete study was November 2014 to May 2016.

Unit of Analysis: A voluntary secondary school

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Following institutional ethical approval from the University of XXXXXXX in Spring 2015, 29 voluntary secondary schools from across different geographical regions in Ireland were invited to participate in the case study. Subject information letters and consent forms were simultaneously sent to school principals and guidance counsellors in the identified schools. In May 2015 one co-educational (mixed-gender) voluntary school consented to take part in the case study following a meeting between the research team and the school team (principal, deputy principal and guidance counsellor) that addressed the research design, shared expectations and concerns, the fieldwork process and dissemination of findings.

The case school had an enrolment of approximately 650-750 students ranging in age from 12 to 18 years. It was in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme and thus received additional support from the DES including the ring-fencing of guidance resources despite the 2012 reallocation. A range of curricular programmes were offered, including the Junior Cycle, Transition Year Programme (TYP) and Senior Cycle. There was one full time guidance counsellor who had an allocation of 22 hours of guidance counselling per week comprising 16.5 hours of one-to-one guidance counselling and 5.5 hours of classroom guidance. There was both a Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle Student Support Team (SST) involved in the personal and social development of the students of which the guidance counsellor was chairperson.

The case school had its own unique Whole School Guidance Programme (WSGP) which was co-ordinated by the guidance counsellor and concentrated on the areas of personal, social, educational and career development of students. It was delivered across the six curriculum years with the involvement of a diversity of school staff and external stakeholders such as parents, employers, community groups and third level colleges. It incorporated mentoring, community engagement and preparation for progression to higher education programmes. In terms of student progression the case school had experienced a significant increase in transition to Irish higher education institutes from approximately 20% ten years ago to 70% in recent times.

Methods

The use of a mixed methods approach in the case study supported the bringing together of context, meaning-making and community processes in the research (Perry, 2009). As case

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

study design can involve "a higher degree of moral risk than other methodologies" (McLeod 2010, p.54) the non-identification of the school and participants was paramount. Volunteer participants were appropriately informed about the rationale of the study, the confidential and voluntary nature of their participation and signed consent forms prior to data collection (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

The fieldwork in the case school took place between May 25th 2015 and March 7th 2016. The data was collected from six data sources who were involved in some capacity in the whole school model of guidance counselling in the case school: school management, guidance counsellor, teaching and support staff, current and past students and parents of current students. The individual data collection instruments for each method were designed to collect data to answer the primary and secondary research questions of the case study from each of the data sources (Yin, 2014). Overall, there was a stronger emphasis on qualitative data methods to capture depth and breadth in the data. The four methods consisted of: (i) semi-structured interviews with the principal and deputy principal, the guidance counsellor and four past students of the case school; (ii) three separate focus groups with a sample of Junior and Senior Cycle students and parents of students enrolled in the school; (iii) an on-line survey to all teaching and support staff, and (iv) naturalistic observations of four guidance counselling activities in the school. Additionally, nine secondary data sources provided by the school were reviewed for an objective examination of communication processes, strategic planning and appraisal of guidance provision (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Merriam 2001). They included the School Plan, School Guidance Policy, School Guidance Plan, WSGP framework and DES Subject (Guidance) Inspection Report.

The qualitative semi-structured interviews were an important form of data collection (Yin, 2009). Individually designed interview frameworks encompassing themes and associated questions were used for the different interviews with a sufficient number of open ended questions to record participant's perceptions and experiences of whole school guidance counselling provision in the case school (Merriam, 2009). The face-to-face interviews were carried out with the school management (*n2*) and guidance counsellor (*n1*). A combination of telephone and Skype interviews were carried out with past students (*n4*) who were dispersed across a number of Irish higher education institutions (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Although there are challenges associated with using Skype for research interviews, such as

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

occasional time lags in the conversation (Booth, 2008), they were beneficial in terms of cost and geographical flexibility (Kazmer & Xie, 2008).

Three audio-recorded focus groups gathered data from current students (*n20*) and parents (*n7*) and produced results with face validity (Krueger & Casey, 2014). They were facilitated in a non-directive and unbiased way using three different thematic interview frameworks to generate data (Krueger & Casey, 2014). The two student focus groups were carried out in the case school during normal curricular hours. The maximum number of participants was ten per group (Horner, 2000), there was minimal age disparity between the participants (Kennedy, Kools & Krueger, 2001) and both genders were included (Hill, 2005). The focus group with the Junior Cycle students was 42 minutes in duration and compromised of 3rd year students, six male and four female. The focus group with the Senior Cycle students was 49 minutes in duration and comprised of 6th year students, seven male and three female. In consideration of Child Protection issues, two members of the research team conducted both focus groups; one acted as the facilitator and the other as the note taker and audio recorder. The facilitator maintained a balance between focusing the conversation on specific topics and being flexible to explore unanticipated issues through probing for understanding and meaning (Krueger & Casey, 2014). The third focus group was with a sample of parents (*n7*) from the School's Parents Council. It was 60 minutes in duration, conducted in the school outside of school hours and involved six females and one male. It was facilitated by one member of the research team in a non-directive and unbiased manner (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

The online questionnaire (SurveyMonkey) was administered to the total population (*n61*) of teaching and support staff with a response rate of 61% (*n37*) after three administration stages. Whilst the use of internet survey platforms has advanced as they are user-friendly and have an added visual attraction, limitations include the time commitment for participants and unfinished surveys being returned (Cohen et al., 2011, Symonds, 2011). Likert and rating scales (Bell 2005) elicited statistical data on perceptions of a whole school approach to guidance counselling, professional roles, guidance activities and interventions and the impact of the 2012 Budget re-allocation of guidance in the school. The open questions captured "the specificity of a particular situation" within the case school (Cohen et al., 2011, p.382).

The four naturalistic and unobtrusive observations were carried out by the field researcher on

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

elements of guidance counselling provision within the case school to contextualise and support validity in the case study (Stake, 2004; Yin, 2014). This involved observing the delivery of two career guidance classes to different year groups by the guidance counsellor, and two SST meetings chaired by the guidance counsellor. The qualitative data was collected using a pre-designed data collection template. Although, such methods can cause behavioural changes in participants when they know they are being observed, selective bias by the observer and judgemental validity of evidence, the four observations provided access to the "real life" of the case school and some of the work executed by the guidance counsellor with students and colleagues (Robson 2002, p. 310).

Finally, even though case study is a distinctive form of empirical inquiry concerns regarding subjective judgements and generalisability were dominant in the case study (Bassey, 1999; Cohen et al., 2011; Stake, 2004; Yin, 2014). The use of multiple sources of evidence, explanation building, detailed audit trail on a Google Drive platform, prolonged activity in the field addressed and reflexivity addressed such issues (Bryman, 2012; Carter & Sealey, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; McLeod, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Yin, 2009, 2014). Respondent validity was used in the semi-structured interviews where the three interviewees checked their transcripts for accuracy. The school management and guidance counsellor also reviewed two draft versions of the case report before its final publication (Tracey, 2010). The team also met regularly, problematised issues, monitored for any incidents of researcher bias, analysed the emerging data at different time points and took part in group interpretation of the findings.

Data analysis

A number of analytical methods were used to answer the case study research questions. The qualitative data from the interviews, focus groups and the open ended questions in the online survey was coded and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six phase framework which involved: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing sections of the case report. The quantitative descriptive data from the online survey was analysed through SurveyMonkey software for variables such as frequencies, age, gender, cross referencing and other relevant data (Gwartney 2007). The scales used and the demographics obtained also contributed toward increasing the reliability of the conclusions of this research (Biemer and

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Lyberg 2003).

The preliminary findings from the different methods were firstly examined by the research team individually and were then followed by a group discussion on the discrete interpretations of the data through the lens of the five research questions which produced richer and deeper understandings of the case. This form of group reflexivity allowed the research team to bring their individual perspectives and knowledge to the analytical and interpretive process and enhanced rigor in the interpretation of the emerging data and overall findings (McLeod, 2014).

Primary Findings of Case Study

This section will elucidate the primary findings from the six different data sources in the context of the original research questions through the three over-arching themes that emerged.

Stakeholder's perceptions of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school

This first overarching theme will address the perceptions of the six stakeholders in relation to their understandings of what the term whole school approach to guidance counselling means. In general, the findings were that there was a nuanced understanding of the meaning of the whole school approach amongst the different participants with examples of convergence and divergence evident in the data. In the interviews, the school management and guidance counsellor unanimously agreed there was a whole school approach to guidance counselling which was underpinned a whole school ethos of whole staff involvement. The school principal viewed whole school guidance counselling as a central aspect of the "culture of the school" especially in the context of the need for "rigorous accountability of the organisation". The deputy principal argued that the school guidance service was "cushioned by the whole school approach" and "…guidance [counselling] is at the centre of that". More specifically the guidance counsellor stated that whole school guidance provision was "…broken into two main areas", one of which was vocational (educational and career) guidance, while the other area was "mental health, and wellbeing in school".

With regard to the perceptions of the teaching and support staff, the findings from the survey were that 63% (*n14*) of staff perceived that there was a whole school approach to guidance

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

counselling, whilst 36% (*n8*) perceived there was not. The expanded qualitative comments demonstrated that some staff perceived that whole school guidance has become "everyone's responsibility", and provision needs to involve "the wider school community", including "families" and "all teachers playing a part". From a governance perspective one respondent stated that "one person with overall responsibility" is the ideal, whilst other staff should be involved "at different but clear stages". However, two respondents indicated they had "no formal understanding" of the meaning of the whole school approach. Staff also reported on who ought to be involved the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance counselling in the case school. Of the total responses (65%, *n24*) the most prominent stakeholders proposed were the Guidance Counsellor (84%; *n21*), Principal and Deputy Principal (68%, *n17*), year heads and teachers (64%; *n16*) respectively, and the Home School Liaison Officer (60%; *n15*). Worryingly, 28% (*n7*) of respondents indicated they did not know who should be involved which raises concerns with regards to the level of knowledge and engagement of staff in this type of guidance provision.

The general observations' of the parents in the study as to what constituted whole school guidance counselling was that this form of provision was largely associated with the work of the guidance counsellor and not with other members of the school community. There was some diversity on what guidance counselling with students involved with a general perception that it was "guidance for the vocation". There was confusion about personal and social guidance counselling with some parents believing that the wellbeing of students was not part of the guidance counsellor's remit as other staff members, such as the chaplain, were responsible for it. The lack of clarity on roles was evident with one parent commenting: "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".

Although the students in the study were not overly familiar with the term 'whole school approach', they reported that a range of school staff including the guidance counsellor, were involved in assisting them with their personal, educational and career related decisions. This emerged in both the focus groups with current students and the interviews with the students who had left the school. One past student reported the guidance counsellor as "a strong presence around the school". The students also reported that some of the teachers were also approachable and helpful with subject and future course choices during particular decision-making points, especially if students had a good relationship with them.

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

A central aspect of the delivery of whole school approach to guidance counselling in secondary schools is the formation of a yearly whole school guidance plan involving key school stakeholders (NCGE, 2004). In the case school this process had been instigated some years previously, but the findings suggested some inconsistencies in relation to the rigor involved. According to the guidance counsellor the guidance plan needed to be updated. The findings from the staff survey indicated poor levels of awareness amongst staff of the existence of the school guidance plan, with 88% (*n22*) unaware of it and only 12% (*n3*) aware of it. With regards to their perceptions on who should be involved in its development, the findings were that the guidance counsellor and the principal are the most relevant contributors (76%; *n19*). They were followed by year heads (72%; *n18*), deputy principal (68%; *n17*), Home School Liaison Officer (44%; *n11*), teachers (40%; *n10*) and School Completion Officer (32%; *n8*) and the DES (12%; *n3*). A number of respondents also indicated they did not know who should be involved (20%; *n5*), while 8% (*n2*) selected 'other' specifying the *"care team"* and "whole school" respectively. Whilst the students and parents were not directly asked about the guidance plan, the findings indicated that they do not make any direct contribution to its development.

The nature of guidance counselling provision in the case school

This theme attends to this issue of how guidance counselling was provided to students in the case school at the time of the study from a cross-curricular perspective. It is strongly advocated in policy that a collaborative working relationship amongst all key stakeholders is required for the effective delivery of the whole school guidance counselling programme and associated activities (DES, 2005, 2012). In relation to the case school it was found that this type of provision had both a direct and indirect bearing on the roles and responsibilities of a number of the key stakeholders involved.

The findings from the interviews with management and the guidance counsellor were that they perceived whole school guidance counselling was being delivered through specific whole school structures such as the school's WSGP, the SST system and the professional activities of the guidance counsellor within the school's guidance allocation. The responsibility for resourcing the school guidance service lay directly with school management and they were also closely involved in the SST structure within the school. The

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

guidance counsellor had a full allocation of 22 hours per week for guidance provision divided across the three domains of personal and social, educational and career guidance. The guidance counsellor responsibilities were multi-faceted and involved a combination of management activities such as whole school guidance planning, co-ordinating the WSGP, chairing SST meetings, as well as student orientated activities such as one-to-one guidance counselling, classroom guidance, and referrals to external agencies. The guidance counsellor reported that guidance was "split down the middle" between career guidance and personal guidance related to student wellbeing. An extremely busy workload was a significant challenge in meeting all aspects of guidance counselling provision, especially with regards to the younger students in the Junior Cycle and the "counselling is one area that is go go go all the time".

The findings from the online staff survey on their perceptions of the types of guidance activities being provided by the guidance service to both Cycle groups also highlighted the level of counselling involved. Of those who responded (59%; *n22*), 77% (*n17*) believed *counselling* was the main activity in the Junior Cycle, followed by *personal and social guidance* (59%; *n13*) and *advice* (50%; *n11*). In contrast, 91% (*n20*) indicated that the main activities in Senior Cycle were equally the provision of *information* and *counselling*, followed by support with career transitions (86%, *n19*) and educational development (68%, *n15*). Some staff were themselves involved in whole school guidance provision in the school, whilst a small number were not. Of the total respondents (51%; *n19*), the majority 84% (*n16*) indicated they had a specific role, while 16% (*n3*) did not. Examples of roles were "leadership" such as year head or form teacher, whilst others specified a "referral" role of students to the guidance counsellor. One staff member reported he/she was an "active member of staff" who provided "support to students". This supportive role also emerged in the findings from both the current and past students who referred to teachers helping them with subject-related career options, support with education related difficulties and as a channel for referral to the guidance service. Some staff also have specific responsibilities as members of the two SST's. The observations of two SST meetings highlighted that management and staff work collaboratively to address the wide spectrum of issues experienced by students including poor attendance, special educational needs, depression, high levels of anxiety and depression, bullying and family or home related problems.

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

The findings from the student focus groups and interviews were that apart from students being 'users' of the school guidance service they did not have a specific role in a whole school approach to guidance counselling. They did not actively contribute to the guidance planning process. They participated in guidance classes, and in some cases had direct contact with the guidance counsellor through one-to-one guidance counselling sessions. However, the unequal distribution of guidance activities to students in the Junior and Senior Cycles was evident. One current Senior Cycle student stated 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". A past student reported that students "only really had contact with the Guidance Counsellor in 5th and 6th year" as the focus was on career decision-making and progression to college.

Finally, the role of parents in a whole school guidance counselling approach appeared to be peripheral. Some of the parents were aware of some of the whole school guidance initiatives, such as the WSGP, and had actively taken part in some organised career learning activities with students. Some of them were aware of the guidance counsellor's role with one stating it was "very visible and…high profile in the school". Nonetheless, the poor communication structures between the guidance service and parents and clarity on the specific guidance activities being carried out with their children was identified. One parent 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". One parent believed that appointments only occurred "unless you have an issue" and students mainly interacted with the guidance service during guidance classes in Senior Cycle. The disparity in the level of direct guidance provision between the two Cycle groups was also raised. A number of parents reported being unaware of any direct contact between guidance counsellor and Junior Cycle students with one commenting it only commenced "when the serious stuff" related to education and career decision-making commenced in the Senior Cycle. Furthermore, parents appeared to be unclear about the nature of one-to-one sessions with some misconceptions evident. Some of them believed that not all students have one-to-one appointments for career guidance. Another parent commented that guidance counselling appears to be "all problem driven" and there may be no intervention from the guidance counsellor "as long as it appears to be sailing, and that's what scares me about it". The overall consensus was that better communication between the school guidance service and parents was needed, as well as

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

allowing parents have more involvement in supporting their children's' personal, educational and career related decisions within the school context.

Impact of Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance provision

The impact of the Budget 2012 re-allocation of guidance provision in the case school was a central feature of the case study. The school's DEIS status had helped to somewhat safeguard the provision of guidance counselling to students as these types of schools were ring-fenced for preservation in Budget 2012 with an allocation of 18.25 hours for guidance counselling (DES, 2012). Nonetheless, prior to 2012 there was a combination of 25 hours allocation in the case school with full time guidance counsellor allocated 22 hours and a part-time guidance counsellor allocated three hours. Following 2012 the three hours were lost and the 22 hours preserved in spite of an ongoing increase in student enrolments' in the school.

One of the major effects of this new situation was the reduction in and quality of one to one guidance counselling sessions with students. The guidance counsellor reported that the personal counselling "is the one area that you sense the cuts have come in, it is the one area that loses out because of time…". The guidance counsellor was using brief solution focussed counselling and more outward referral to external support services; "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…". Adequate time was a consistent issue for the guidance counsellor and even though vocational guidance counselling sessions should be conducted with all Senior Cycle students, "timewise, that mightn't always happen because that takes a chunk of time" and "time is a problem". This high workload was reiterated by the school principal "if you're one person trying to make an impact" on such a high caseload of students "it's just not going to happen…".

With regards to the perceptions of staff on the impact of Budget 2012 on guidance provision on the school the findings were more nuanced. Of those who responded to the question (59%; *n22*) the majority (68%, *n25*) were uncertain of any changes, 18% (*n4*) had not seen any changes, and only 14% (*n3*) had noted some changes. Nonetheless, some staff identified the need for "more guidance hours" or "another Guidance Counsellor", whilst others alluded to the provision of additional time for "social and personal counselling", especially for students with emotional issues and at risk of self-harm.

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

With regards to the findings from the students and their parents there was a general perception of a busy professional with a heavy workload trying to cover a lot of guidance activities on their own. One Senior Cycle student stated the guidance counsellor was "doing the best….given such a limited space" Another Senior Cycle student 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.....". Interestingly, in spite of the whole school approach in the school one student suggested "there should be more of a guidance team instead of it all falling to the Guidance Counsellor". Parents also alluded to the busy role of the guidance counsellor perceiving someone "who is always in a hurry and busy". Poor levels of communication between the guidance service and parents was specified, but it is unclear as to whether this was a direct consequence of the re-allocation or an issue that had been ongoing for some time.

Discussion of Finding and Implications

In policy discourse, the whole school model of guidance counselling has been promulgated as an exemplary model of guidance service delivery to meet the growing personal, social, educational and career needs of students, without any significant evidence to support this assertion (DES, 2005, 2009, 2012; NCCA, 2007; NCGE, 2004). The impetus for this case study research project was to explicate how this proposed model was being delivered in a single school during a particularly difficult period for the guidance profession in Ireland (Abma & Stake, 2014; Simons, 1980, 2009; Yin, 2014). The potential learning generated from this case is both time and context bound and not dependent on being representative of a wider truth in relation to whole school guidance delivery externally (Abma and Stake 2014; Stake 2010). The findings generated from the case study point to conflicting perceptions of the conception of whole school guidance counselling, the integrated model of guidance counselling, the specific roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders and the impact of the re-allocation of guidance provision in Budget 2012, all of which may bear similarities with other secondary schools.

Although a whole school approach to guidance is promoted in policy its rationale is complex (Lam and Hui, 2010). Arising from Budget 2012 the emphasis on a whole school approach to guidance counselling in Irish secondary schools became more pronounced. In particular, the model was presented by policy makers as an organisational adjustment to maintain

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

schools statutory requirement to provide appropriate guidance services according to the Irish Education Act (1998), whilst also ensuring that guidance counsellors returned to curriculum subject teaching (DES, 2012). In essence, it became a dual role. In the case study school there was an embedded (McLeod 2007) guidance service with one guidance counsellor who was endeavouring to provide a dispersed model of whole school guidance. Its innovative use of the schools WSGP and the SST structure was inclusive of a variety of stakeholders in the school community. Nevertheless, the findings pointed to divergent formations of the whole school model of guidance counselling amongst the various school stakeholders, which may comparable to the situation in other secondary schools. As schools are complex organisations the relevance of school culture and norms needs to be considered in the delivery of this type of model (Fullan, 1993; Goodson, 2001; McCoy et al., 2006). Therefore, the values and levels of awareness of school management can influence how guidance is delivered within a school setting (McCoy et al., 2006). Even though the school management in the case school exhorted a whole school ethos some staff appeared to be unfamiliar with and not involved in guidance provision.

Despite the growing arguments for a pedagogical approach to career learning and development in schools the process of infusing guidance themes into an academic curriculum while simultaneously addressing the individual social and personal development needs of students is multifaceted (Barnes et al 2011; Lam and Hui 2010; Lapan et al 2016; Watkins 1994). Although the school management and guidance counsellor in the case school articulated a mutual understanding of the integrated model of guidance counselling (personal and social, educational and career), this did not necessarily correlate with the perceptions of some of the other stakeholders involved. Elements of personal and social guidance were particularly notable in the school's pastoral care structures such as the SST's, whilst the educational and career-related dimensions were primarily the remit of the guidance counsellor through co-ordinating the WSGP, in-class guidance and one-to-one guidance sessions. This placed a heavy workload burden on one individual which was noted by all of the participants in the study.

Another key finding was the issue of greater transparency on the involvement of key stakeholders in whole school guidance provision. The identification of clear roles and responsibilities of each member of the school community including students and parents in

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

the whole school model is imperative (DES 2005, 2012). Associated with this is the necessity for appropriate education and training of school staff in order to understand and fully embrace the concept of whole school guidance counselling (Foxx et al., 2017; Hearne et al., 2017). It has been suggested that 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). The 2012 Budget re-allocation of guidance counselling devolved the responsibility of resourcing the school guidance service to school management (DES, 2012). This was evident in the case school with school management overseeing the delivery of whole school guidance counselling.

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). Increasingly, though, professional role boundaries and workload concerns for school staff have become important factors in secondary schools (Gatsby Foundation, 2014; Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hui, 2002). In the case school the sole guidance counsellor had an all-encompassing and complex role with responsibilities ranging from co-ordination, classroom delivery, one-to-one guidance counselling and referral. 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. Nonetheless, the findings were that some teachers were knowledgeable about the whole school guidance model, had clearly defined roles and responsibilities and others were not as fully involved.

The Irish Education Act (1998) enshrines the rights of parents to be considered as partners with full negotiating rights within the Irish education system. The parental role within a whole school approach to guidance counselling is viewed as a contributing factor to the career decision making of their children (McCoy et al., 2014; NCGE, 2004; NGF, 2007). 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. Although the guidance counsellor and the school management in the case school emphasised that there was regular communication with parents, the parents themselves contradicted this and sought a more clearly defined role in the process. The important role of students in whole school guidance provision emerged in this case study. Suggestions have been made to involve them in school guidance planning through student council forums (NCGE, 2004). The students in

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

the case school did not appear to contribute to how the guidance service was being delivered to them. Students are often the silent voice in the school guidance process and stronger engagement in terms of providing feedback on their experiences of receiving guidance counselling is warranted.

Case study research in educations settings is highly valuable but time consuming. It is also a collective process and necessitates a comprehensive understanding of what case study methodology entails as well as the establishment of strong collaborative partnerships between researchers and schools. Therefore, the limitations of the case study are that it only captures the particular situation in one voluntary school and further research is necessary in other school types such as single gender, non-DEIS, community schools and private schools. The issue of accessing schools to do an in-depth case study of whole school guidance counselling proved extremely difficult with numerous attempts at sampling in different geographical regions taking much longer than expected until the case school volunteered to be involved. This highlights the complexities of conducting research within the real-world constraints of a demanding school setting (Lapan, Marcotte, Storey, Carbone, Loehr-Lapan, Guerin, Thomas, Cuffee-Grey, Coburn, Pfeiffer, Wilson & Mahoney, 2016)

Moreover, due to time constraints, other relevant stakeholders as referenced in policy (DES 2005; NCGE 2004) who have some level of involvement in whole school guidance provision were not included, i.e. Board of Management (BOM), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS). These stakeholders may also have provided important understandings of whole school guidance, albeit from a more removed perspective. Nevertheless, a key outcome of the research project has been to inform guidance counsellors and researchers on the methodological protocols involved in carrying out case study research within the guidance counselling profession as explicated in the published case report.

Conclusion

The single case study provided an in-depth, holistic and nuanced interpretation of guidance counselling provision in Ireland in the context of an ever-changing policy and practice landscape between the Budget 2012 reallocation and its partial restoration in more recent times. Although the findings are specific to the case study, it is envisaged that the key issues

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

that emerged in the case study may have relevance to other secondary schools both in Ireland and internationally where models of whole school guidance counselling exist. The extensive breadth of the Irish guidance counsellor's role in terms of personal and social, educational and career guidance counselling places significant demands on the practitioner and the whole school. A whole school approach offers noteworthy possibilities but a stronger positioning of guidance within the school system, a supportive school culture and greater partnership within the school community is required. Furthermore, sufficient allocation of human resources and structural opportunities for all staff, students and parents is needed to fully engage in the process (Hearne et al., 2017; Gysbers & Henderson, 2014). This is particularly relevant in the context of the need for equitable and socially just guidance counselling provision to students in Irish secondary education where there continues to be a disproportionate privileging of provision to some students over others (Hearne et al., 2017).

Corresponding Author: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

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