



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

National consultation on a strategic framework for lifelong guidance

Report on emerging key messages
August 2023

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Introduction and background

In 2022, Minister for Education Norma Foley, TD, established the National Policy Group on Lifelong Guidance to develop a coherent long-term strategic framework. The National Policy Group comprises five Government Departments:

- The Department of Education (DoE);
- The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS);
- The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY);
- The Department of Social Protection (DSP); and
- The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE).

The work of the National Policy Group focusses on ensuring a coherent national long-term policy on lifelong guidance.

To inform the work of the National Policy Group and the design and vision of the Strategic National Framework for Lifelong Guidance, a public consultation was held by the Department of Education. This report is a summary of the key messages received from this public-consultation process.

A Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance will be agreed upon by the Policy Group and is expected to be published in 2023.

Summary of the consultation process

The public consultation on lifelong guidance took place in January and February 2023.

All stakeholders were invited to first read a consultation paper (DoE, 2023) which outlined the background of guidance in Ireland and provided a rationale for the development of lifelong guidance. This publication also introduced the international experience of guidance policy and outlined the vision for lifelong guidance in Ireland. This consultation paper can be accessed here: [National Framework for Guidance - Consultation Paper](#)

Focus groups, written submissions and an online survey facilitated a mixed-methods approach to the consultation process. This provided stakeholders with various means and multiple opportunities to contribute. Flexibility and equity of access were prioritised in designing the public-consultation methodology. As a result, a broad range of stakeholders (including but not limited to individuals, groups, national organisations and representative bodies) contributed to the consultation. Each of the three methods ran concurrently and stakeholders were invited to provide their views through one or more avenues at their discretion.

In total, the DoE received 61 written submissions. Some 611 survey-engagements were recorded and 11 focus groups were facilitated.

Section one of this paper provides an overview of the focus-group process and key messages received therein. Section two provides an account of the written submissions received. Section three outlines key messages received via the online survey. The closing section provides a brief overview of key messages arising from the consultation at large. It is noted that while this publication provides a comprehensive overview of the data gathered in the national consultation, it is not an entirely exhaustive account.

Section one: Key messages arising from focus groups

Overview

A total of 11 focus groups were held in January 2023 as part of the consultation. Some 88 participants attended the groups.

Purposive sampling was utilised to formulate the focus groups. Stakeholders were selected and invited to attend for the focus groups to be representative of all stakeholders in the guidance landscape. This ensured that a wide variety of views across the guidance and education space were facilitated, many diverse voices were heard and a geographical spread was achieved.

Some 10 of the focus groups took place online, while one – a focus group with primary-school children and their parents – took place in-person in the Department of Education in Marlborough Street, Dublin. All focus groups were attended by three or more departmental officials. Focus groups were not recorded through technological means. However, views were recorded by two or more of the officials in hand-written format.

A semi-structured approach to the focus groups was orchestrated. Focus groups were issued a list of questions prior to taking part and these were referred to as ‘prompts’ during the focus groups, as follows:

- What are the strengths and the challenges relating to current guidance services? What improvements can be made?
- Is the current service/model inclusive and accessible?
- What business and industry supports are you aware of/are required?
- What portals on guidance are you aware of or have engaged with?

Questions relating to each of ‘the pillars’ as outlined in the National Framework for Guidance - Consultation Paper (Department of Education, 2023) were asked, with some tailored to specific groups. A flexible approach to facilitation of the focus groups was prioritised in line with the semi-structured nature of the focus groups.

Key messages emerging from the focus groups

An overarching message emerging from the focus groups is that the inherent value of guidance in various settings (not just limited to educational settings) was universally acknowledged. In general, focus-group discussions related to enhancing, improving, and expanding current guidance provision. There was no call for reducing or eradicating the practice of guidance in any setting. A small number of participants spoke of positive experiences of guidance, while most expressed a desire for more access and increased provision. Increasing provision of and access to guidance was viewed as particularly important, as the way we learn and work is changing.

While each focus group brought a different perspective to the consultation, several key messages emerged as common across some or all of the groups, which will be explored in this section.

The holistic approach to guidance

One strength of the current model of guidance experienced by the focus-group participants that was returned to regularly throughout the focus groups was the concept of the holistic approach to guidance. Guidance counsellors and their ability to provide educational and career guidance, as well as personal and social guidance, was highlighted consistently. Many of the groups explored this space and reached a consensus that guidance must involve a holistic approach as all areas are intertwined: it is not possible to discuss a person's aspirations for their career without addressing aspects of their life which might hinder or help their progress.

Within a school setting, meeting the needs of all students, in all areas of guidance within this holistic model was also articulated as a challenge; there is difficulty with ensuring enough time is allocated to guidance to balance all aspects of the holistic approach. For example, in some schools, it was raised that so much time is dedicated to personal and social guidance counselling, it is difficult to address career and educational guidance.

Regarding all settings in general, there was a strong viewpoint expressed by many, that any changes made to the guidance model should maintain this holistic approach. Guidance counsellors' representatives in particular were protective of this and displayed opposition to reducing the role of guidance to an isolated focus on careers.

The role of the guidance counsellor

While there was a deep appreciation of the holistic approach to guidance, there were consistent calls to formally define the role of a guidance counsellor. This was particularly highlighted by stakeholders within adult guidance and Further Education and Training context.

A need to 'firm up' on terminology being commonly used within the guidance space to ensure consistency across the sector was also expressed: what does 'guidance' mean? What does 'guidance counselling' mean, and encapsulate? What does 'career management skills' mean?

Focus-group participants noted it is important to acknowledge that guidance counsellors can and should refer more serious matters to the services available, which, it was discussed, can be viewed as additional support as opposed to replacement support.

There was robust discussion throughout almost all focus groups in respect of a guidance counsellor requiring a teacher qualification to provide guidance services within the school setting. Views differed strongly across and within the focus groups themselves. Some participants noted that the teaching requirement hindered diversity and diversity of experience in the guidance profession itself. Other participants noted that people with various industry backgrounds and networks could play a valid role.

However, in some groups, there was a strong consensus that the guidance counsellor should be embedded, as a teacher, in the school community.

Questions around the length of time it currently takes to fully qualify as a guidance counsellor and, particularly, to what level a guidance counsellor is qualified to address personal and social issues were also raised during the focus groups.

Access and personal experiences

All participants, speaking of their own experience, revealed varying degrees of access and engagement with guidance. Within the school system, there were reports of low levels of access and variance of quality depending on the context – an example expressed at one focus group being the disparity between guidance within fee-charging schools and those in the free-education scheme. Allocation of guidance counsellors and guidance hours is important in contextualising the various degrees of access.

Many of the participants in the focus groups felt that guidance counselling was tied directly with the transition from secondary level into third level and the CAO, the Leaving Certificate and university took prominence in these discussions. A focus group with university and third-level students indicated poor information available on other pathways, including apprenticeships and PLCs during this transition period. This was also reflected by other focus groups in discussing the bias around certain pathways.

Other periods of transition were acknowledged in the focus groups. For example, transitioning from primary to post-primary was discussed in the parent's focus groups, who indicated that subject choice was primarily the focus.

Gaps exist in terms of guidance provision in certain settings and were raised across several of the groups as follows:

- It was noted that guidance counselling was perceived by some as something accessed while in school and others thought guidance was only accessed while in education. There was little awareness that there is access to guidance beyond the education sector. Indeed, participants in focus groups revealed they were not aware of adult guidance offerings, for example, prior to the consultation process.
- Throughout focus group discussions at large, the Irish Prison Service, special schools and Youthreach were also identified as areas in which guidance provision is perceived as “not available”.
- Special schools were referred to as they do not have access to guidance. The lack of ambition and low expectations for this cohort were discussed in some focus groups.
- Children with additional or special educational needs within mainstream schools were identified as a group in need of additional support in the guidance space, especially during transitions.
- Irish-language provision of guidance was also discussed by Irish-language groups involved in the focus group process. It was emphasised, for example, that students within Gaeltacht areas should be able to access guidance in their own language.

- The unemployed are another group identified within focus group-discussions, particularly by their representative bodies, as being underserved with guidance provision. It was expressed that guidance provision sometimes can be solely focused on “getting a job”, any job. This was expressed in as being problematic and it was argued that supporting the individual to identify a career through holistic reflection should be the focus.

Channels of information

Many focus group participants felt there was a plethora of online guidance information available to them, but the information can often be confusing, overwhelming, difficult to navigate and can “push” certain pathways and courses.

In discussing the need for a centralised portal, there was positive feedback from the majority of participants. There were repeated calls for better signposting of information, particularly among parents and students and indications that there is a need for central portal to guide people to the correct resources and existing services in a way that is independent and impartial. Many discussions around how this portal would operate took place across the focus groups. Some believed a centralised portal is needed while others noted that signposting to information on other portals would be more appropriate. However, participants expressed a clear desire for any new online portal to be supported by a team of people, instead of relying on a solely digital response.

In general, the overwhelming message across all focus groups was that while guidance information and guidance services exist, they are not marketed or communicated properly to the wider public.

Lifelong guidance

There was appetite across almost all focus group participants for guidance to take place at a much earlier stage in life. There was a general view that discussions around careers, subject choices and more should begin at fifth/sixth class in primary school. There was also a consensus among the two focus groups with parents, that the parents themselves should be equipped with relevant information to ensure they can answer queries from their children.

Role of digital technology versus in-person or one-to-one guidance

Across a number of focus groups, there was an acknowledgement of the role that digital technology could play in guidance, but many felt strongly that it should only play a minor role. Some expressed preference for one-to-one interaction with a person and that there should be additional interactive support to any digital service provided. However, some representatives within the disability and access space spoke positively of the increasing move to remote guidance (including meetings and appointments) in meeting people’s needs.

In looking at digital supports, focus-group participants noted that it is important to ensure they are accessible and inclusive to all. Use of plain language was provided as a suggestion.

Psychometric assessments were flagged in more than one focus group as being difficult to understand and interpret, indicating a need for one-to-one guidance to interpret and discuss results, as opposed to relying solely on a computerised report.

Work placements, industry and business links

While goodwill exists amongst employers with regard to offering placements, as revealed in the focus groups, participants felt that links with industry need to be stronger. It was also noted that links must exist within all sectors as well as at all levels throughout life. Focus-group participants discussed educators and those in education by way of example and many agreed that training and upskilling is required for teachers and guidance counsellors to learn more about workplaces, industry and business.

Work placements were discussed across a number of the focus groups. While the value of these placements was acknowledged (particularly in the post-primary Transition Year programme), there were varying opinions on the value of the experiences and requests for a more structured and uniform approach were noted. The focus group within which enterprise groups participated referenced a difficulty in knowing who to contact to offer work placements or how to begin this process in a formal way.

Some focus-group participants described school work experience as a “tick-box exercise”. It was noted that focus-group participants viewed the scheme as a platform for students to gain summer employment, which was seen as different to enhancing an understanding of a long-term career and developing a skillset. Many focus-group participants noted that geographical, financial, and social barriers exist within work-placement programmes and should be investigated.

Within discussions on inclusion and access, many focus-group participants agreed that employers need more support in offering work placements to those with special and additional needs – likewise, the employee or work-placement participant may need a more bespoke approach to ensure the success of the placement.

Section two: Key messages arising from written submissions

Overview

A total of 61 written submissions were received through the consultation process.

The submissions were composed by a very wide range of stakeholders. National organisations represented the majority of submissions. However, regional and local groups of stakeholders were also well represented and many submissions were written by individuals such as principals, guidance counsellors and others with a strong interest in lifelong guidance.

Submissions were invited on any of the content outlined in the consultation paper or any other area pertaining to lifelong guidance. The structure, approach and focus of each submission was at the discretion of the author. Key messages emerging from the 61 written submissions are documented in this section.

Key messages emerging from the written submissions

Holistic nature of guidance

It was clear throughout the submissions that stakeholders place tremendous value on the holistic nature of guidance in general and the holistic role of the guidance counsellor specifically.

Some submissions referred to the focus of [Indecon \(2019\)](#) on career guidance and noted that it did not address all aspects of, nor encapsulate the full potential of guidance in Ireland. Many contributors noted a perceived diminution of the holistic model of guidance and requested a balanced representation of the holistic role of guidance counselling in future policy publications.

Throughout many written submissions, clarity around the role of guidance in relation to social and personal counselling was evident. It was observed that guidance counsellors need a clear understanding of the boundaries of their roles. In addition, it was noted that guidance counsellors must continue to maintain the boundaries between guidance counselling and therapeutic counselling. This observation was evident with regard to submissions discussing guidance counselling in all sectors. However, it arose most often as an issue pertaining to the post-primary sector. It was noted, for example, that mental-health issues arise in schools daily and that clarity around the level of qualification of guidance counsellors to support students as they experience significant personal issues would be welcomed.

Role of the guidance counsellor

It was evident throughout the submissions that there is a perception that role of a guidance counsellor is not clearly defined. For example, variability in the role is evident between sectors. Specifically, the submissions referred to guidance counsellors as having a strong role to play in wellbeing in the post-primary system in general, while adult guidance is perceived by some to have a greater focus on employment and recruitment.

Some variability between guidance services in each sector was also evident. For example, it was noted that the skills, expertise, and the breadth and complexity of guidance roles in each sector vary significantly and that this differentiation must be taken into consideration within the strategic framework.

Role-overload for guidance counsellors was a concern noted in many submissions and the concern expressed that burnout in the profession could be a significant issue.

Stakeholders requested clarity in relation to the role of guidance services and clarity around the role of guidance counsellors within each sector. For example, it was observed that the role of guidance counsellors and advisers needs to be reviewed as there are distinct differences between both, in terms of service delivery based on diverse needs of individuals accessing the services.

Qualifications of those working in guidance

The qualifications of those working in guidance was referred to in many submissions.

The broad number of roles within guidance in each sector was noted. It was also noted that “others”, such as adult guidance-information officers and career consultants in higher education (to name just two examples) play a vital role in guidance provision. The diversity of backgrounds of individuals working in these roles was celebrated within the submissions as adding diversity to guidance services as they bring experience from areas such as entrepreneurship and self-employment, occupational psychology and human-capital consultancy.

Regarding guidance counsellors specifically, general acceptance of the retention of minimum acceptable standards for programmes of guidance counselling stipulated in the [Programme Recognition Framework \(DES 2016\)](#) was noted throughout many submissions. Simultaneously, a contemporary review of the framework would also be welcomed by stakeholders. Some submissions noted that a training-needs analysis would help identify what areas guidance counsellors require for their continuous professional development.

Many submissions referred to the post-primary sector where dual qualification is required in order for a guidance counsellor to be fully qualified for the role. Fully qualified guidance counsellors working in this sector hold both a teaching qualification and a guidance-counselling qualification. Division of opinion was evident among the submissions. The dual qualification is highly valued by some and those advocating this position sighted the importance of regulation of those working in post-primary by the Teaching Council (for which a teaching qualification is required). In addition, the combination of a teaching qualification and a guidance qualification was recognised by many as an extremely beneficial skill when

delivering classroom guidance activities, which is integral to the role in a post-primary setting. Other submissions requested that the teaching qualification for guidance counsellors in schools be removed and cited as a strength, the variety of occupational backgrounds and identities that guidance counsellors who are not post-primary teachers come from. A lack of diversity within the profession itself and a shortfall of guidance counsellors in the system were also referenced as reasons to remove the teaching qualification, which is viewed by some as a barrier.

Guidance training

Most observations in relation to the training of guidance counsellors referred to a system that should include regular and co-ordinated review and evaluation. Submissions noted that training programmes should evolve to match the needs of contemporary guidance services. It was suggested that modules such as inclusion, equity, access, integrity in use of data, sustainable development goals and the role of IT in guidance are now vital for guidance counsellors in all sectors and should be included in initial training and in Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

A small number of submissions noted that the cost associated with training as a guidance counsellor could potentially be perceived as prohibitive, particularly where diversity within the profession is concerned.

With regard to CPD, submissions called for a united and cross-sectoral approach to training. It was noted that lifelong guidance has this, and will continue to use this method, provided by a number of professionals in a variety of settings; guidance is not limited to the work of the guidance counsellor in post-primary schools. Throughout the submissions a recommendation for a programme of CPD that provided collaborative training between guidance counsellors, adult information officers, practitioners in Intreo offices and more was evident.

Lifelong guidance

The development of a clear and coherent system of lifelong guidance was universally accepted as a worthwhile and welcome initiative in the Irish system across the submissions. However, some contributors highlighted that the [National Guidance Forum \(2007\)](#) had previously addressed lifelong guidance and expressed disappointment that this forum was not referred to within the consultation paper.

It was widely acknowledged that early intervention is imperative in a lifelong guidance system. Within written submissions, it was noted by some that intervention at primary level would be a very welcome evolution within the vision for lifelong guidance. A number of submissions noted that guidance should begin in fifth or sixth class, although the provision of guidance-related concepts in the [Aistear](#) curriculum were also referenced and identified as beneficial.

The importance of alignment of national policy was emphasised in a large number of submissions. As a concept, lifelong guidance is perceived as a strategy that should be incorporated into many other relevant areas. For example, it was observed that commonalities are shared between lifelong guidance and the Further Education and Training strategy (FET). Similarly, contributors highlighted that the strategic framework for lifelong guidance should refer to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), where possible.

Access to guidance

Access to guidance in general was perceived throughout the submissions as problematic across all sectors.

'Mainstream' guidance services and systems were described as ad-hoc and inconsistent. This description was not limited to guidance provision in one sector but applied to services in general. However, 'mainstream' groups were identified as Senior-Cycle students in post-primary schools and students attending FET. The issue of access to 'mainstream' or 'general' guidance was typified in one submission which referred to guidance provision in post-primary schools prioritising sixth-year students.

Access to guidance for vulnerable groups was also reported throughout the submissions as problematic. Many vulnerable groups were identified within the submissions. Travellers and Roma, homecarers, women, individuals in direct provision, people experiencing homelessness, individuals with unmet literacy issues, numeracy and basic digital-literacy needs, adults with lower-level qualifications, individuals in receipt of social welfare and mature students were just some of the groups listed as vulnerable. This is not an exhaustive list.

For access to guidance services to become more equitable, an all-inclusive, universally targeted, "user-friendly" system was requested throughout the written submissions. Linked to "access" was the concept of "visibility". For example, it was noted that a roadmap of agencies and other guidance supports should be developed and a clearly defined process for referrals/self-referrals should be outlined and promoted. Similarly, it was suggested that outreach guidance programmes should be developed to fill in any identified gaps in guidance provision.

Pathways to opportunities

Within the submissions, numerous calls for enhanced pathways to multiple opportunities across education, training and work were evident. The development of the strategic framework for lifelong guidance is perceived by stakeholders to be a significant opportunity to further complement pre-existing pathways and opportunities. Specifically, the current "hyper focus" on higher education and the points system were observed in many submissions to the detriment of other avenues already in existence in the Irish education, training and employment landscape.

In addition to current pathways that are already available, new pathways would be welcomed by those who contributed submissions. It is recognized that guidance services have a role to play in providing key information to individuals wishing to access opportunities through various pathways. In addition, greater clarity and coherent guidance on application processes for alternative pathways to higher education and on partnerships with employers were requested.

Links with employers

'Employers' is a term used here to describe all business, industry and for the purpose of this document, includes the work of entrepreneurs. The symbiotic relationship between education and employers was referred to in many of the submissions. Indeed, stakeholders are clear that effective guidance requires significant links with employers in order for individuals to access work placements and experience the world of work for fully informed decision making.

It was clear from the submissions that stakeholders value engagement with employers in guidance. For example, it was noted that work placements are a highly effective method of introducing individuals to the world of work, raising awareness of different opportunities, developing employability skills and allowing 'a taster' of what a particular career or role might entail.

A lack of cohesion within the current work-placement system was identified by stakeholders which has resulted in unequal access across the system at large. It was noted that a centralised channel for industry to connect and engage with schools, including a centralised system for managing work experience should be created to facilitate and nurture long-lasting links with employers. Indeed, sustainable employability and empowering individuals through the development of career-management skills was highlighted in a number of submissions as the most desirable approach for a contemporary lifelong guidance system.

Funding/allocation

Stakeholders noted that the vision of lifelong guidance and the success of the strategy will depend on the funding made available and calls were made for ring-fenced funding for the delivery of effective lifelong guidance services.

Guidance information and a core portal

It was noted throughout the submissions that a core portal could enhance flexible delivery options and that a personalised and interactive approach, offering customised e-learning resources, and career-learning pathways would help individuals to achieve their future goals. It was evident that a single comprehensive and reliable information portal would be welcomed.

It was also noted throughout that several high-quality organisations are already operating online and providing useful information and resources. However, it was observed that the current landscape is fragmented and a surplus of information online can be confusing for the end user. In progressing this element of guidance, it was recommended by a number of contributors that consultation take place with current providers to avoid duplication of service provision. Indeed, it was noted that a core portal could enhance flexible delivery options in a landscape that is currently fragmented. It was noted that "a digital platform should aim to unify competing options".

With regard to the common message that the quantity of guidance information available online is significant and could be overwhelming, a personalised and interactive approach, offering customised e-learning resources and career-learning pathways was widely recommended. Achieving a balance

between technology and direct guidance support is identified as a key issue. It was observed in many submissions that in-person services are vital for supporting individuals' guidance.

“Access” was highlighted as a vital issue for guidance information in general and any future core portal in particular. It was advocated that information should be delivered in a user-friendly, accessible, plain-language format using universal design principles. Clear information should be available on all guidance supports and on how students can access them. In addition, information should be accessible to learners and families from diverse backgrounds and communities.

Regional centres/hubs

A frequently referenced suggestion within the submission was the development of centres or “guidance hubs” on a local or regional basis. It was proposed that this would provide all members of the community with access to information and support. In addition, it would enhance visibility to guidance. It was also suggested that links with local and regional employers could be facilitated through these hubs.

Models such as the career hubs in the UK and the Education and Training Boards Ireland FET centres in Kerry, Laois and Offaly were provided as effective examples that could be rolled out on a national level. These models offer multiple means of interaction with their communities. For example, they are described as operating on a “drop-in” basis and are described as an “attractive one-stop shop” within the submissions. In addition, they are perceived as a means through which general awareness of guidance could be raised. It is noted that visitors to these hubs can access information themselves within the centre or they can access impartial guidance support on a wide range of employability, training and education options.

National co-ordination and collaboration

Throughout the submissions, the importance of a co-ordinated and collaborative approach at national level was recognized. It was observed that “synergy” and “meaningful development” can only be facilitated through co-ordination and collaboration at a national level. It was noted that an effective system of lifelong guidance can only be achieved if decision-makers prioritise collaboration. Partnerships must be fostered at all levels in order for all citizens to enjoy full engagement in the world of work so that they may flourish and effectively utilise their talents to make a positive contribution to society.

Research

Evidence-based decision-making was celebrated by many contributors and a call for additional research in the guidance landscape in general and the impact of guidance in particular was welcomed.

It was requested that where possible and appropriate, data should be available at a national, regional and local level. It was recommended that data should be gathered and presented in a format that is easily assimilated so that any updates can be quickly made where required.

Section three: Key messages arising from the survey responses

Overview

A total of 611 survey engagements were recorded during the consultation process. A response where a participant had answered one or more questions was considered valid by the Department and subsequently included in the analysis. Those who engaged were able to submit their response irrespective of whether they had answered each question.

The survey was administered online via the online Checkbox platform. The link for the survey was circulated to stakeholders through multiple modes of communication, including social media. The survey contained a range of question styles including single-choice questions and 'free-text' responses. A negative or null response, or statement was an option for all questions. The survey was made available in Irish and English. Respondents were asked to complete the survey and submit their responses anonymously. No personal data was gathered as part of the survey process.

Respondents had the option of identifying a category or group of stakeholders they identified with. Responses were received by guidance counsellors, teachers and parents as a majority. Responses were also received from primary-school pupils and lecturers.

The data obtained from the survey was analysed using the software provided on the Checkbox survey platform. The data was subsequently collated, reviewed, and key messages summarised as outlined in the section of this report. In all cases, and unless otherwise stated, the percentages cited refer to the percentage of responses provided to a question and not as a percentage of the overall survey.

Key messages emerging from the survey

Vision and objectives

Respondents were presented with the proposed vision for lifelong guidance as a "more unified Guidance system which will allow all young people and adults to have access to high quality and appropriate lifelong guidance".

When asked about the importance of making lifelong guidance a reality:

- 83% felt it was very important;
- 14% felt it was important;
- 1% stated that they did not know; and
- 2% rated it as being unimportant.

When asked about the importance of improving the quality of evidence-based guidance-policy services, information and digital tools:

- 74% felt that it was very important;
- 22% felt that it was important;
- 2% responded that they did not know; and
- 2% deemed it to be unimportant.

When asked about the importance of professionalisation of guidance, acknowledging the diversity of guidance roles and the professional training required for each role:

- 84% felt that it was very important;
- 13% felt that it was important;
- 9% said that they didn't know; and
- 1% deemed it to be unimportant.

When asked about the importance of promoting inclusion, lifelong career mobility, equity of access and active citizenship through sustainable education, lifelong career-management skills, diverse training, and employment pathways:

- 86% felt that this was very important;
- 13% that it was important;
- 1% that they did not know; and
- 1% that it was unimportant.

Respondents were also asked if they would suggest adding any other strategic objectives (in addition to those detailed above). Answers included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Guidance must be a person-centered process;
- There should be increased national investment e.g., investment in the guidance allocation in post primary schools and other settings;

- Guidance should continue to foster a Whole School Approach at post-primary;
- Inclusion is vital; and
- There should be empowerment of the individual, through knowledge and access to information.

Proposed pillars

The following proposed four pillars (action areas) were presented to respondents as having been identified as key areas to focus on, to achieve the vision and objectives of lifelong guidance for all. Respondents were asked to consider these pillars and respond to a series of questions on each.

Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3	Pillar 4
Lifelong guidance services and Information provision	Professionalisation of lifelong guidance	Access and inclusion	Lifelong guidance, career management skills and career mobility

Pillar 1 – Lifelong guidance services and information provision

The survey questions, present with Pillar 1, were designed to gather respondents' views regarding the current level of guidance information and services. It also sought to identify the means to support access to comprehensive, high-quality, user-friendly, and accessible careers and skills information, as well as how to improve access to appropriate guidance and the requisite support in navigating that information.

When asked about the quality of education and career information currently available:

- 7% felt that it was of very high quality;
- 22% of high quality;
- 44% that it was satisfactory;
- 23% that it was of poor quality; and
- 4% that it was of very poor quality.

Respondents were also asked if they considered the education and career information that is currently available to be user-friendly and accessible to all:

- 15% felt that it was very accessible and user-friendly;

- 30% felt that it was quite accessible but that there was room for improvement;
- 40% felt that it was somewhat accessible;
- 21% that it was not very accessible; and
- 5% that it was not accessible at all.

When asked if they had accessed guidance counselling support:

- 35% had accessed support at school;
- 15% had accessed support at college;
- 25% support privately;
- 10% had accessed adult guidance services; and
- 15% had never accessed guidance counselling supports.

Respondents were then asked if they felt that there were any gaps in current guidance counselling services and lifelong guidance direct support,

- 33% felt that there were very significant gaps;
- 45% felt that there were some significant gaps;
- 19% felt that there were small gaps;
- 3% felt that there were no gaps; and
- 12% indicated that they did not know.

Respondents were asked to identify where they saw gaps in the area of lifelong guidance services as well as gaps in information provision on courses, education pathways, careers, jobs, skills, and the labour market information. Common answers and broad themes from those who answered included:

- Balance is required in the role of guidance. There seems to be a focus on guidance for a few, in the personal and social space, rather than guidance for all (educational and career) in the post-primary system;

- Development of a robust and advanced curriculum for guidance would be welcomed at post-primary level;
- What constitutes a fully qualified guidance counsellor?; and
- The lack of connectivity between the various guidance providers. There is a need for one central site which includes all services, for example: Intreo, ETBI adult guidance, apprenticeships the Association of Higher Education Careers Services and post-primary.

When asked what the issues with the information available were/are, broad themes across the responses included:

- The system is currently fragmented, overwhelming and too numerous;
- There is an abundance of high-quality information, but centralised system would enhance this; and
- The system is currently restrictive and can present another barrier to those lacking literacy, digital literacy, numeracy and language skills.

When asked about what is going to be an increasingly digital society and how we might achieve a better balance between technology and direct guidance support, common answers and broad themes included:

- There is a need for digital support that is supported by an in-person guidance hybrid model;
- There should be an awareness of the audience and of access issues when developing above;
- There should be good quality information across channels, including AI, apps and bots; and
- Digital wellbeing needs to be considered.

Respondents were then asked if there were any comments that they would like to make and/or to provide their top three priorities for action under Pillar 1. Common answers and broad themes to their answers included:

- Guidance must be integrated, accessible to all with equality of access and collaboration of agencies;
- Information should be centralised, effective and online – and should be one-stop shop;
- The new National Apprenticeship Office should work with guidance services; and
- There should be increased hours for Guidance in school settings.

Pillar 2 – Professionalisation of lifelong guidance

In relation to the professionalisation of lifelong guidance, respondents were asked if there was a need to make the qualifications required to work as a guidance counsellor in different settings more explicit (for example: post-primary schools, special schools, further education, Youth Reach, adult guidance, higher education guidance, prisons).

- 63% answered yes;
- 26% answered no; and
- 12% responded that they did not know.

When asked if they thought that there is a need for a regulating body for guidance counsellors:

- 79% answered yes;
- 13% said no; and
- 18% that they did not know.

Participants were then asked if they think that there is a need for different levels of guidance qualifications to work in different guidance roles:

- 54% answered yes;
- 33% answered no; and
- 14% responded that they did not know.

In relation to post-primary guidance counselling, participants were asked if they would like to see a course developed that would serve to fulfil the Teaching Council Professional Masters of Education requirements and the Guidance Counselling-course requirements in one programme of study:

- 62% stated that they would;
- 21% said no; and
- 18% responded that they did not know.

When asked if they would like to see more guidance counselling courses provided by the HEIs:

- 80% felt that that they would;
- 6% said no; and
- 15% said that they did not know.

Respondents were then asked if they felt that Professional Learning and Development opportunities equip Guidance professionals to keep abreast of all the latest information and developments:

- 22% said yes;
- 42% said no; and
- 36% felt that they did not know.

Finally, respondents were given the opportunity to provide further comments they would like to make and/or provide their top three priorities for action under this pillar. Common answers and broad themes included:

- Widening the professional understanding of the tertiary sector, upskilling in guidance, ability to switch across sectors:
- Continual personal and professional development is required for this role with opportunities to specialise:
- There is a need for a nationwide committee that looks at CPD and has regular workshops;
- Counselling skill and guidance counsellors being “free” to attend CPD.

Pillar 3 – Access and inclusion

In this section, respondents were asked to identify gaps in current services in respect of access and inclusion.

- The opening question asked participants whether there were gaps in the current services:
- 84% indicated that they felt that there was;
- 6% disagreed; and
- 11% felt that they did not know.

In response to the question as to where the current gaps exist, common answers and broad themes included:

- Lack of qualified guidance counsellors;
- Lack of resources to realise the target of “guidance for all”;
- Certain groups not being targeted by or availing of guidance services, for example: retirees, career changers; and
- A gap in guidance services for those with disabilities (for example: those with Down syndrome) and in special schools – the provision of guidance here can be inadequate.

Regarding what actions can be taken to make guidance services more inclusive, common answers and broad themes included:

- Increased allocation of guidance counsellors;
- Consideration given to the target audience of resources/information/services/material and altering the approach to match this;
- Training given to guidance professions in working with these cohorts. Groups include migrants, retirees, asylum seekers, refugees and people with disabilities; and
- Opportunities for guidance counsellors to also receive training in other cultures and look at how other countries approach guidance.

Respondents were then asked to consider whether we are missing any groups from the ones mentioned already under the Pillar. (i.e., those with a disability/newcomers/ students/ unemployed/ employed/ retirees/ migrants/career changers). Common answers/broad themes included:

- Members of the Travelling community;
- Irish speakers;
- Members of LGBTQA+ community:
- Career-returners, including mothers returning to work, stay-at-home parents returning to work, carers returning to work;
- Primary-school children;
- Those with disabilities and additional needs;
- Those with literacy/numerical/digital needs;
- Those who are in prison/leaving prison;
- Refugees/newcomers/asylum seekers;
- People with mental illnesses and mental health difficulties, for example: anxiety or trauma;
- Children and young adults in the care and foster system; and
- Those living in disadvantaged areas and/or from low socio-economic backgrounds.

When asked to consider what were the top three priority actions under this pillar of inclusion, respondents identified the following:

- Access to guidance and ensuring guidance is accessible to all and free;
- Services being made available to minority groups/disadvantaged groups e.g., migrants, those with disabilities, LGBTQA+, people with literacy/numeracy/digital needs and should be targeted towards those groups;
- Training being made available to guidance professionals in the area of access and inclusion, disabilities, for example: through CPD and add-on modules;
- Digital resources: guidance being made available remotely, online resources and one-to-one appointments bookable online;

- Resources should be user-friendly and targeted;
- A need for quality guidance provision across entire lifespan, and an understanding of this within the guidance community;
- A need for emphasis on career-changers;
- Groups within inclusion and accessibility to be included in framework and services design;
- Greater links with the community, employers and more;
- Guidance to be introduced into special schools; and
- Improved guidance counsellor allocation.

Pillar 4 – Lifelong guidance, career management skills and career mobility

The opening question posed to respondents in this section asked whether they were aware of the full range of opportunities in education and training:

- 33% indicated that they were fully aware;
- 58% that they were somewhat aware; and
- 9% felt that they were unaware.

When asked whether they knew where to look for information about the education, training and employment opportunities and labour-market skills shortages:

- 39% felt that they were fully aware;
- 47% that they were somewhat aware; and
- 15% stated that they were not aware.

Asked where they would first look for information about the education, training and employment opportunities, and the labour-market skills shortages, those who responded expressed the below:

- The majority of responses indicated responders would look online;
- Others indicated they would contact local employment services or a guidance counsellor; and
- Some indicated they would look at reports or indicators of skills shortages.

Respondents were then asked how they would rate their own career-management skills, for example: the ability to plan and organise their career:

- 34% felt that they were very skilled;
- 48% that they had developed good skills; and
- 12% that they developed satisfactory skills;
- 4% that they had limited skills; and
- 3% felt that they had no skills.

Asked whether they thought that career-management skills should be taught in schools and in further and higher education settings:

- 90% of respondents felt that they should;
- 5% said no; and
- 5% stated that they did not know.

When asked if adults who are career-changing, returning to the workforce or unemployed have access to the necessary support to help with career planning:

- 21% said yes;
- 64% said no; and
- 16% felt that they did not know.

When asked where they can or should be able to go, respondents mentioned the following:

- Guidance counsellors mostly indicated ETB adult guidance services. General concerns around visibility and accessibility are prevalent throughout.

When asked how we can empower learners throughout their lives to manage their lifelong education and career paths, common answers and themes included;

- Guidance needs to begin in primary school;

- Continued support for learners and employers;
- Consolidation/centralisation and improvement of online resources; and
- Greater access and visibility for people with disabilities.

Respondents, when asked whether there was a strong social and cultural bias towards higher education:

- 86% felt that there was;
- 9% that there was not; and
- 6% indicated that they did not know.

Of those who responded to the above affirmatively, when asked if this has resulted in a reluctance in learners to pursue apprenticeships and further education, responses included the following:

- The vast majority of respondents believe there is a reluctance to pursue apprenticeships and further education;
- There is an emphasis on higher education.
- Better information for employers, for example: lowering minimum eligibility requirements;
- Employers do not create enough placements for apprenticeship training, or invest enough; and
- Consolidation of apprenticeship services with greater access and visibility;

In relation to improvements that could be made in terms of exposing young people to work and career opportunities before they make their career choices:

- 92% indicated that there were;
- 2% that there were not; and
- 7% said that they did not know.

When asked what those improvements might be, common answers and broad themes included:

- Need for mandatory formal and structured work experience with universal over ad-hoc approach;
- Development of additional resources would support this area, currently one portal provides a limited number. This should be increased;
- Links between industry and schools should be improved and formalised, and local and international networks should be developed; and
- Incentivised work experience for adults.

Further comments and suggestions

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they had any further comments related to guidance. Comments and themes included:

- Visibility and accessibility. The promotion and consolidation/centralisation of these services is key. The current system is too fragmented;
- There is a need for increased and improved online services;
- Guidance should be lifelong;
- Greater knowledge of the labour market at a national and local level can focus guidance and career choices;
- There is a need for improved guidance and support relevant to people with disabilities who are seeking employment.
- CPD for guidance counsellors;
- Expanding number of guidance counselling courses at QQI Level 9;
- Monitoring and evaluation of guidance counsellors to maintain standards and identify areas for CPD;
- Regulation body to maintain standards;
- Returning to ex-quota allocation;
- Recognition of guidance as a holistic model of support: it is not just a focus on careers, there is also personal/social guidance counselling;
- The complexity of issues being presented in schools has increased;

- Counsellors are not qualified to deal with students' mental health issues – a requirement for another tier of professionals, counselling psychologists;
- A lot of responsibility is on the guidance counsellor, and this can often be forgotten; and
- Increased pay, improved working conditions and respect are required.

Section four: Summary of key messages (KM) across the consultation process

Analysis of the consultation data at large highlighted a number of key findings, many of which were addressed by a number of stakeholders. The key messages presented here provide a summary of the data in general, some of which has been outlined in earlier sections of this publication. This section is included in this report as an overarching summation of the perspectives of stakeholders as expressed in this consultation. A recommendation arising from each key message is outlined to inform future publications, policy development and actions regarding lifelong guidance.

KM1: Terminology and definitions

Throughout the consultation data, it is evident that inconsistent language, varied terminology and a range of definitions of key words are contributing to certain confusion about all aspects of guidance.

Most significantly, it was noted that 'guidance' has become a term that is widely used to describe several services, actions and activities. Similarly, the definition and role of the guidance counsellor was deemed to be unclear. The level of misunderstanding and misinformation about "what guidance is and is not" was identified as problematic within the consultation. The strategic framework for lifelong guidance was observed as a key opportunity to redefine what is meant by the term 'guidance' to introduce the new concept of 'lifelong guidance' and to promote widespread understanding of each.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

A clearer and broader universal definition of the range of guidance services that comprise 'guidance' in general and 'career-management skills' in particular, would be welcomed. Promotion and correct use of these terms among all stakeholders is vital to increase clarity and eliminate confusion in all sectors.

KM2: Holistic approach to guidance

From the submission data, emerged the concern that the National Framework for Guidance Consultation Paper focuses on career guidance only, thereby displacing educational and personal guidance counselling. Some contributors perceive that the quantifiable 'hard outcomes of guidance' related to the world of work (career information, skills shortages, and labour-market information) were emphasised with a lack of appreciation that guidance can help promote qualitative, soft or transversal outcomes such as wellbeing and the holistic and mature development of an individual. Similarly, it was observed that lifelong guidance should equip individuals with information pertaining to lifelong learning and should value such education as a worthy pursuit in its own right as opposed to exclusively attaining education with the goal of career development for the benefit of the labour market.

Contributors highlighted that a holistic approach is beneficial to the individual and society simultaneously. Holistic guidance is conducive to social cohesion and integration. It involves fostering and maintaining the conditions for full engagement in the world of work so that people are allowed to flourish and

contribute to the economy and society, and express unique talents. Indeed, a holistic approach to guidance is conducive to creating a workforce that is more dynamic and able to diversify over time to meet future demands. Simultaneously, an individual often presents guidance during times of crisis and or change. At these times, a holistic model provides impartial support to individuals who require space to process options based on sound information and time to reflect on unique experiences, life stage and economic and social circumstances.

Career satisfaction, fulfilment, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation must be considered when individuals select jobs with activities that are congruent with their interests; individuals must have the self-awareness to assess their values and interests and how these they may interact, overlap, and combine to optimise their job-related satisfaction. This will be discussed further under the topics of 'recruitment' and the 'role of the guidance counsellor' later in this section.

In particular, it was noted that the holistic model of guidance counselling may not currently be the model in place in all settings. It was noted that at the level of the individual, experience of guidance depends on age and location within which the service is accessed. This was perceived by many contributors as problematic. Additionally, it was argued that if this strategy for lifelong guidance is truly a lifelong and cross-sectoral strategy, the holistic model should be adopted across all services. In supporting this view, contributors note that when an individual feels heard, understood, supported, then they are in a better space to be more self-aware, gain the skills they need to research their choices and are confident enough to act.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

In the context of multiple points of guidance interventions, it is recommended that a holistic model of lifelong guidance be examined and the role of each guidance counsellor, in each sector, be described in greater detail in relation to the holistic model.

KM3: Lifelong guidance

This section focuses on three aspects relating to lifelong guidance:

1. The model of lifelong guidance;
2. The role of the guidance counsellor in each sector; and
3. Collaboration and enhancing links.

Each aspect is addressed in this section. However, it is noted that each aspect is best understood in relation to the broader lifelong guidance context.

1. Model of lifelong guidance

Discussion as to the meaning and definition of ‘lifelong guidance’ arose throughout the consultation. It was described within the consultation data as a movement of support for individuals from the cradle to the grave. The opportunity to create an agreed and inclusive vision for lifelong learning cross-sectorally, recognising that many stakeholders have a part to play in making culture, policy and practice a reality was celebrated.

Lifelong guidance was valued in the consultation as a timely evolution as, 21st-century citizens are likely to make multiple career changes and transitions, requiring new skills, new expertise and developing new social networks at every turn. As a result, individuals will constantly be on a learning journey, regardless of their qualifications. As labour markets continue to shift at an accelerated pace, to facilitate smooth career transitions, workers are also expected to continuously develop their skills by engaging in lifelong learning and are faced with a growing diversity of learning pathways across traditional fulltime education, apprenticeships, online and remote learning, and modular learning such as micro-credentials. Hence, it was identified that now more than ever, individuals need access to a robust professional guidance service to navigate their choices.

To achieve national and European ambitions regarding lifelong learning, it was recognized that Ireland needs to build on existing structures towards a new model of lifelong guidance. Contributors were united in their view that such a model could provide a coherent, structured system to support individual career management for the benefit of the individual, the education system, employers and society. Contributors advocated for the dismantling of traditional silos in guidance and welcomed a vision that will be a comprehensive national approach providing a wide range of guidance services.

A consensus was evident in the consultation data that within the overall definition of lifelong guidance should include early intervention. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this section.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

It is recommended that further detailed consideration be given to designing a clear and well-communicated model of lifelong guidance in Ireland. This model should incorporate pre-existing structures and foster collaboration to eliminate traditional siloing of work and ensure there is a continuum across all life stages.

2. The role of the guidance counsellor in each sector

The broader role of the guidance counsellor is discussed throughout this publication and the importance of a holistic approach to guidance was discussed earlier in this section. The consultation gave evidence of an overall recognition that lifelong guidance in general is the ‘key to unlocking potential’. Concurrently, discussions of the role and responsibilities of guidance counsellors in relation to each sector arose within the consultation data due to the unique structures, ethos and communities involved in each unique sector.

Key points made in relation to guidance at primary level will be discussed in detail later in this section.

In the post-primary sector, while all aspects of the role of guidance were discussed and valued, guidance was closely linked with and understood through student wellbeing. It was observed by many contributors that a significant per-capita increase in mental health issues is experienced in schools on a daily basis.

Student-wellbeing has been negatively impacted by the recent Covid-19 lockdowns, school closures and social media. Longstanding social issues such as socioeconomic background and bullying were also referenced. Guidance counsellors are recognized as often being the first point of contact for students experiencing emotional and psychological problems. The role of the guidance counsellor in supporting students with regard to their social and personal decision-making was highly valued by contributors. In addition, the contribution of the guidance counsellor in relation to Junior Cycle wellbeing was celebrated. The consultation data referred to classroom guidance as a valuable integration on the school timetable.

A concern was raised that role-overload has become the norm for guidance counsellors in general. This will be discussed further in relation to guidance allocation (post-primary) and funding (other sectors) later in this section. It was also noted that guidance counsellors are not qualified or mandated to provide ongoing individual therapeutic support for students with complex emotional needs. Throughout the consultation, clarity on the boundaries of the guidance counsellor was requested, particularly where the boundary between guidance counselling and therapeutic counselling is concerned.

Guidance counselling in the FET sector involves supporting older adolescents (sometimes under 18 years) and adults. Guidance is provided in the FET sector through numerous services as outlined in section two of this document and each service has different structures. The Adult Education Guidance Service (AEGS) provides impartial guidance to adults of any age, including those not engaging in FET. While the importance of holistic guidance was referenced by many contributors (as discussed earlier in this section) in relation to FET and adult guidance, a focus on educational and career-related decision-making was evident.

Within the consultation, calls for promotion of each FET and adult guidance service were called for, as visibility within the current guidance system was perceived as low. In addition, the role of guidance counsellor within a supportive team context was identified as an area requiring attention, clarification and promotion. For example, the role of the adult guidance information officer was deemed to be often overlooked and misunderstood. The role of the FET and AEGS guidance counsellors is discussed in detail in relation to recruitment, later in this section.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

Guidance services require a distinct, clear and well-defined professional identity. The work of the guidance counsellor is perceived as inconsistent and diluted with the concurrent expectations of guidance supports as a panacea for all social and economic challenges requires a review for clarity of the role. The role of the guidance counsellor in different settings must be clearly defined. Clear information on the role of the guidance counsellor in each sector, and on how individuals can access guidance, will eliminate confusion and provide for a deeper level of impact within a collaborative and integrated landscape.

3. Collaboration and enhancing links

Lifelong guidance, as discussed above, can only succeed in the context of collaboration and strong links at local, regional, national and international levels.

Strong links were identified by some, for example between guidance colleagues in the local partnerships, Intreo, occupational health, youth groups, as well as advocates for a range of disability, recovery and

homeless services. However, a large number of consultation responses illustrated a current system of guidance that is perceived as fragmented and inconsistent in its provision. Emphasis was placed on collaboration as integral to creating and maintaining synergy to facilitate best practice within lifelong guidance.

Notwithstanding the emphasis placed on developing greater collaboration within the system, the consultation data shows one of the greatest challenges facing individuals is the discontinuity across systems in terms of access, availability, tracking, and inter-agency communication. While each service is working intensively to provide relevant and timely services, they suffer not only from capacity challenges and long waiting lists, but also from a lack of coherence of provision.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

A high-level review of inter-agency cooperation, connectivity and communication is recommended. A comprehensive exploration of the current system, a mapping exercise, will provide information on overlaps and gaps leading to a more effective and efficient system of lifelong guidance in the future.

KM4: Access and inclusion

Barriers preventing individuals from accessing guidance information and services were highlighted throughout all areas of the consultation as follows:

Barriers to accessing guidance

Three main barriers were identified with regard to accessing the services of qualified guidance counsellors as follows:

- Visibility of guidance services;
- Demand, resourcing and capacity of services; and
- Shortage of appropriately qualified personnel.

From the national consultation, it was evident that a lack of awareness of guidance services exists in all sectors. It appears that there is no “common knowledge” about the services that exist outside mainstream education. It was noted in information provided in submissions that many guidance-counselling positions remain vacant, particularly in the school sector. It was also noted that guidance services are under pressure and waiting lists apply.

In addition, it was noted that guidance provision is often unbalanced and is not targeted towards young people equally. It is perceived that in higher education for example, the service is targeted towards final-year students and in post-primary settings, resourcing constraints limit the availability of one-to-one guidance sessions to sixth year.

It was recommended throughout the consultation that “everyone should have access to suitably qualified professional guidance”. However, it was noted “only the very brave and resourceful find a route to career

guidance services post second-level". As a result, a variety of consultancy services are responding to demands in the market. Those operating these consultancy services may not have adequate training and may therefore deliver inappropriate guidance and incorrect information to the vulnerable individual requiring the service.

Barriers to access to guidance information and supports in general

Access to guidance information was identified as a challenge for all. It was noted, for example, that a central portal or repository for information in general would be welcomed as will be discussed in relation to guidance Information later in this section. However, with specific regard to access, the provision of accurate and up-to-date guidance information through an online portal was identified as "only a starting point" and "not sufficient in itself".

Additional measures to ensure inclusion were suggested by contributors. For example, it was suggested that all guidance resources and information should be delivered in accessible, plain-English formats using universal-design principles. In this way, a focus is placed on changing attitudes throughout society, and democracy, equity, and principles of citizenship and stewardship are fostered. In addition, it was noted that in our contemporary multicultural society, not all individuals have the English-language skills nor the digital skills to effectively navigate any online elements and that this should be carefully considered.

Furthermore, contributors noted that the current established culture is problematic and inclusive policy is required for a change in culture. Possible solutions included transformed pathways, lifelong guidance and other elements discussed at large in this chapter. However, with regard to inclusive policy, additional barriers to access include a lack of ambition for minority groups who have not had appropriate access to guidance to date. Specific minority groups were identified as being particularly vulnerable.

In order to address these issues, it was recommended that professional guidance training (in the form of CPD and added modules to teacher and guidance-counselling training in the first instance) should be made available to change the current established culture. Training for guidance counsellors in all sectors, should directly target the barriers relating to access and promote multiple methodologies for wide-ranging inclusion and targeted interventions for specific vulnerable groups such as those attending special schools, to name one example.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

It is evident that a need for equality and equity of access is required both with regard to guidance counsellors and guidance information. Future evolutions in guidance must facilitate accessibility and inclusivity.

KM5: Guidance allocation and funding

Given the role of guidance and inclusion and access as outlined above, the issue of funding of guidance in general and the post-primary application of guidance counsellors specifically arose at multiple points in the consultation. Limited funding was identified as a major barrier for guidance at all levels and increased investment was called for in order to add value and provide targeted interventions in the new vision and practice of lifelong guidance.

With regard to post-primary guidance in particular, a meaningful increase in resourcing for guidance in the face of a generation of students with unprecedented needs was requested. Notwithstanding socioeconomic circumstances and issues relating to marginalised groups, access and inclusion, a review of the continuing exclusion of fee-charging schools from a full guidance allocation was requested as it represents an unacceptable anomaly, as the challenges facing young people know no social or any other boundary. In addition to increased guidance allocations, a model for how a school should best apply guidance provision was requested as, while each school has autonomy in allocating resources; a strong guiding light would be welcomed.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

Funding and investment would be welcomed in order to implement an efficient and effective lifelong guidance strategy.

KM6: Guidance information – a digital portal

The distribution of guidance information through a digital portal was discussed at large throughout the consultation.

It was recognised that technology can provide curated information on many areas relating to guidance including pathways of progression, appropriate skills supports and access to opportunities. Indeed, digital technologies were perceived by many as an opportunity to improve access and delivery of information and enhance engagement through new communication pathways. For the individual, it was noted that effective use of digital technology would render guidance information more accessible and easier to find thereby helping individuals to navigate the complexities of modern life and reach their full potential. Additional benefits for management and policy makers include efficient data collection, labour-market intelligence and evidence-based policy development.

While there are many advantages to the enhanced role that digital technology could play in strategic lifelong guidance, a balanced approach was requested by stakeholders. Information overload was a widely acknowledged issue within the consultation as was the issue of key information falling through the gaps. Accessibility was a key point raised by many contributors. It was recommended that information needs to be accessible in a range of formats including online, via mobile apps and to meet different learning styles and accessibility requirements. In addition, stakeholders called for a service that includes signposting to reliable sources of support for individuals in understanding the information.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

There are a number of portals containing a wealth of information on learning opportunities and careers available in Ireland. The value of a more cohesive and accessible system was recognised. Work is already well advanced by DFHERIS in terms of creating a cohesive career-information service potentially through the establishment of a single portal/one-stop information resource.

KM7: Qualifications – training, CPD, supply of guidance counsellors

The consultation provided an opportunity for submissions relating to the training and qualifications of guidance counsellors. It was noted that a full review of the initial training of guidance counsellors would

be welcomed. In addition, it was suggested that a training-needs analysis would help identify what areas guidance counsellors require to provide a quality service. Areas suggested for an increased focus included the changing labour market, inclusion and an individual's attitudinal barriers (for example: low expectations, intergenerational disadvantage). In addition to reflections on CPD, it was noted that there is a need to review quality-assurance mechanisms whereby providers of guidance can be audited effectively, and best practice established particularly in relation to personal and social guidance counselling wherein additional clarity on the boundaries of the role was requested.

Where the training and qualifications of guidance counsellors was addressed within the consultation, a focus on the shortage of appropriately qualified personnel was evident. In particular, the post-primary sector registered significant difficulties with a lack of appropriately qualified guidance counsellors available for employment. This has resulted in a proportion of posts being filled by professionals with partial qualifications only (for example: some guidance counsellors will have been trained as adult-only guidance counsellors while others do not have a teaching qualification). Within the consultation data, it is evident that there are strongly divergent views on the requirement for a teaching qualification for guidance counsellors to be deemed appropriately qualified to work in the post-primary sector.

Many contributors argued that a combination of the teaching qualification in addition to the guidance qualification is extremely beneficial to the skillset of the guidance counsellor. The dual qualification of guidance counsellors is understood not as a tautological point. Rather, guidance counselling in second-level schools is an integrated model comprising activities that are complemented by both professional training experiences. Indeed, it was argued that the teaching qualification should remain, as in-class guidance is a strong and necessary component of guidance at post-primary. There is a significant pedagogical knowledge required to teach guidance lessons; classroom management and lesson-plan development are integral to the second-level guidance counsellor's role. In addition, the teaching qualification and registration with the Teaching Council is identified as a regulatory process and seen as an advantage within the system. Finally, in support of the dual qualification, it was noted that dual-role guidance counsellors value classroom time to establish relationships with their students and the perspectives gained in each role are mutually beneficial.

Conversely, many contributors expressed the opinion that guidance counsellors do not need to be a teacher, a focus on a 'life-stage approach' and information-giving should be the focus. It was noted that those who are not qualified as teachers had experience in other areas and that they could bring additional skills and experience to the post-primary system.

In working towards a solution for the sector, it was proposed that a structure mirroring that provided for special-education teachers should be created as an immediate measure to upskill individuals who are not appropriately qualified. In addition, it was suggested that the Department could collaborate with existing guidance counselling programme providers to offer additional complimentary courses.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

A review of (i) existing training (ii) CPD and (iii) qualifications for employment in the post-primary sector in particular would be welcomed

KM8: Early intervention/primary-school guidance

Where 'early-intervention' was discussed by contributors in the consultation, one key message was unanimous: career development is a developmental process, which begins in childhood and is lifelong.

An individual's perceptions of occupations, curricular subjects and assumptions about 'the self' occur early with long-term impact. Indeed, it was proposed that integration of guidance earlier in the education process could reduce unconscious bias, circumspection and compromise, before irreversible decisions are formed based on factors such as gender or socio-economic background. It was identified that Aistear goes some way to including some key concepts. However, it was noted that, similar to the concepts of literacy and numeracy, guidance-related concepts should be addressed as early as possible for maximum positive impact. Indeed, the lack of formalised guidance results in missed opportunities to influence the future talent pipeline.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

Consider introducing guidance-related concepts more formally at primary level.

KM9: Culture and pathways

In relation to the current culture and focus on pathways, a clear message around perceptions of 'success' as linked to higher education, was evident. Indeed, contributors suggested that a cultural imperative of progressing to higher education and scoring CAO points is a "hyper focus" within the current ideology. The importance of recognising the diversity of individual pathways and aspirations when determining what 'success' looks like was noted, particularly with regard to moving beyond standard education pathways and employment outcomes.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

Stakeholders would advocate an impetus towards visibility, value and attention being placed on alternative routes to careers and education.

KM10: Links with industry and work experience/placement

It was widely acknowledged within the consultation that business, industry and enterprise have a key role to play in supporting individuals to access career mobility, upskilling and retraining opportunities across their lifespan. Exposure to work-placement opportunities has significant potential to enhance access and inclusion. If we can empower all individuals to pursue their potential by offering support and championing new ideas, we can create a more diverse business landscape.

Current structures were described as disjointed, ad hoc and reliant on individual relationships. The apparent lack of cohesion, it was observed, can disadvantage individuals and institutions. It was acknowledged that business and employers may want to engage and provide work-placement opportunities. However, the absence of a centralised channel for connection and engagement was perceived as a significant challenge.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

Creating regional centres, accessible to professionals and individuals, could enhance opportunities for all.

KM11: Recruitment

Use of the term ‘recruitment’ within the consultation paper yielded a strong response from contributors. It was noted that ‘recruitment’ and ‘guidance’ are two separate concepts underpinned by different and, at times, opposing philosophies. Guidance, it was argued, is underpinned by the concept that the individual asserts their own agency to determine their pathway in education, work and in life. Guidance refers to education and employment only if it matches the needs of the client; it is impartial.

It was acknowledged within the consultation, that Ireland’s international reputation and profile as an innovative, agile and high performing economy is critically dependent on the quality of its workforce. This demands a robust and durable supply of talent and highly skilled workers with the recent Government White Paper on [Enterprise Strategy 2022-2030](#) highlighting the need to build on Skillnet Ireland’s enterprise networks to drive workforce development.

Workforce development, as part of a broader focus on lifelong learning, is critical to ensure that the Irish workforce is technologically advanced and highly skilled, with the leadership skills to seize the opportunities of the digital and green transitions. However, clarification was requested about the role of ‘recruitment’ and use of terminology such as ‘more targeted Interventions’.

A concern was expressed that a focus on these concepts would result in narrower interventions, aimed at feeding the needs of the marketplace as opposed to the needs or wants of the client. Indeed, it was noted that when a guidance counsellor meets with an individual, external pressures for recruitment should be absent and steering groups of people into careers simply because there is an identified skills gap would be unethical and against key theories underpinning guidance interventions.

Recommendation arising from the consultation data

Guidance must be impartial. Clarity between guidance and recruitment must be provided to ensure the best outcome for individuals, society and the economy.

KM12: Research and evidence-based evaluations

Contributors to the national consultation welcomed the commitment towards evidence-informed quality assured guidance services with a balanced approach to monitoring and evaluating development across personal/social, educational and vocational domains. It was noted that in order to achieve the objectives of strategic lifelong guidance, a greater level of investment and corresponding accountability and it would be good to understand the intention around investment and how impact will be measured. In addition, it was recommended that, where possible and appropriate, data should be available at a national, regional and local dimension.

Conclusion

As outlined in the introduction to this publication, the work of the National Policy Group focusses on ensuring a coherent national long-term policy on lifelong guidance. This report provides a summary of the key messages received from this public consultation process.

Throughout each of the sections, a brief overview of respondents is provided. An extremely broad range of stakeholders participated in this consultation. However, clear and consistent messages emerged as outlined above.

This report provides an account of guidance as it is currently experienced and perceived by stakeholders in Ireland. The public consultation, as outlined, was successful regarding the level of engagement by a very wide range of stakeholders. It is acknowledged that there are strong messages relating to guidance in post-primary education in particular in this report and that post-primary guidance is just one component of a very comprehensive lifelong guidance system in Ireland.

Decisions regarding lifelong guidance will have broad and longstanding impact for citizens of Ireland. The National Policy Group recognises that it is incumbent on policymakers to integrate the voices of stakeholders into national policy.

The Department of Education thanks all stakeholders for their contribution to this national consultation.

References

[Indecon \(2019\) Indecon Review of Career Guidance](#)

[DES \(2016\) Programme Recognition Framework. Dublin](#)

[DOE \(2023\) National Framework for Guidance - Consultation Paper](#)

[Solas \(2020\) FET Strategy](#)