

# **Draft Guidance on the implementation of whole-school guidance in post primary schools (2025)**

## **ASTI Submission**

**April 2025**

### **Introduction**

The ASTI has in recent years contributed to a number of public consultations on the guidance counselling service including Departmental Review of Career Guidance (2028), the Indecon Review of Career Guidance (2019), the National Framework for Guidance (2023) and other Departmental documents on the service (2025). Accordingly, this submission will not reiterate wider policy considerations but rather will focus on the key issues highlighted in the consultation invitation, namely, the effectiveness of the guidance allocation model and the draft guidelines on the implementation of whole-school guidance. We would refer the Department to the ASTI's 2023 submission for wider commentary on the importance of retaining the holistic integrated model of support that is currently provided by the guidance counselling service in schools.<sup>1</sup>

### **Effectiveness of the guidance allocation model**

In the first instance, the ASTI must put on record our satisfaction that a key theme of this consultation is the effectiveness of the guidance allocation model. Practically every submission that the ASTI has made on curriculum, student wellbeing, special educational needs, educational disadvantage in recent years has drawn attention to the need to review the guidance allocation model.

Currently, schools receive an ex-quota allocation in respect of guidance provision. It is calculated by reference to the approved enrolment and the category of school (DEIS, non-DEIS, fee-charging). From this guidance allocation, school management deploy the hours for guidance lessons, small group work, one-to-one meetings, engagement with other school services, etc. While measures in budgets in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2022 have resulted in the guidance posts that were withdrawn in Budget 2012, being restored from September 2022, the basic allocation ratio for allocation remained unchanged. The work of the guidance counsellor has in the meantime, as multiple curriculum and policy frameworks are rolled out in schools and most students with additional and special educational needs are educated in mainstream classes, expanded exponentially. Quite simply, the allocation ratio is completely inadequate to meet the current and emerging demands placed on the guidance service.<sup>2</sup>

While the Department of Education maintains that all 600 Guidance Counselling posts lost to schools during austerity have been reinstated, the ASTI would respond by stating that since that time the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.asti.ie/document-library/asti-submission-to-consultation-on-guidance-framework-feb-2023/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/news-and-events/news/news-article/2024/09/rcsi-research-identifies-worrying-trends-in-mental-health-of-adolescents-in-ireland>

school population has continued to grow and the guidance enhancement model is difficult to quantify in terms of full-time posts. Moreover, there is inadequate data on the deployment of guidance counselling hours across the 700+ schools. The 2023 pre-budget submission of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors in 2022 found that, when combined with classroom teaching of guidance counselling which equates to 5.1 hours, guidance counsellors were spending 10.6 hours weekly in the classroom (IGC, 2020). Moreover, 10.6% of full-time qualified guidance counsellors in second level schools are not practising at all, while at the same time 22.4% of schools report using unqualified internal staff to deliver guidance counselling, equating to 6.4 hours per week; and 26.4% of schools report using external providers for counselling, equating to 7.40 hours weekly.

Clearly, there is a need for a comprehensive survey by the Department of Education to establish how guidance counselling resources are being deployed across and within schools.

An equitable, transparent, and objective ex-quota system is urgently required, with a specific allocation for one-to-one guidance. There should also be provision of a specific guidance allocation in relation to the number of special classes in mainstream schools, given the centrality of the role to the operationalisation of the Continuum of Support model of provision.

### **Workload and role-overload**

As noted in its 2023 submission, the workload of guidance counsellor is increasingly unsustainable in that additional requirements on the role are not supported by additional allocations to schools. The introduction of the junior cycle Wellbeing Programme in schools is a case in point. As one of the four pillars of the Programme, guidance provision across the three years of the junior cycle must be provided on a whole-class and individual basis. However, this Programme did not result in the delivery of additional guidance resources to schools. Similarly, the introduction of a new model of SEN resource allocation to schools in 2017, which placed responsibility on schools for the development of the profile of need in the school, also did not result in any additional guidance counsellors to schools.

While related to workload, role overload has become the norm for guidance counsellors. Every policy development in schools – wellbeing, promoting mental health, student support teams, inclusion of students with special and additional needs/the continuum of support, school self-evaluation, exemptions from the study of Irish– contain additional responsibilities for guidance counsellors. It is of note that the most recent Chief Inspector's Report confirms that the role of the guidance counsellor has become more complex, with increased pressure on guidance counsellors to provide a comprehensive and holistic service.<sup>3</sup> (p.170)

### **Recruitment of guidance counsellors**

Difficulties in the recruitment of guidance counsellors to schools, as noted in the recent Chief Inspector's Report, are driven by a number of factors. Chief among these is a lack of places on HIE accredited guidance courses. A related factor is the high cost of qualifying as a guidance counsellor, most of which falls on to the individual teacher. Another dimension of the supply problem is the fact that schools are frequently unwilling to release teachers to engage in the placement hours (typically

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/611873-chief-inspector-reports/>

130 hours) if they already have a guidance counsellor in situ. This is an unacceptable situation both for the teacher wishing to obtain additional qualifications and the wider system needs for an adequate supply of guidance counsellors. Another factor is the high level of burnout among guidance counsellors as manifested in the 10% or more identifying as same in IGC research. Workload, role overload, emotional demands of the role are impacting as never before on the service in schools.

The solutions to the supply problem must include increasing the number of Department-approved Master's/Postgraduate Diploma programs in Guidance Counselling, currently only available Dublin City University (DCU), Maynooth University, and the University of Limerick (UL). It is important to point out that places on these courses are not confined to registered teachers. The Department must take measures to ensure that more higher education institutions are supported to provide the course and also examine additional options or pathways for teachers into guidance counselling, including recognition of prior learning (RPL) options as part of any future workforce development plan.

Another solution to the supply problem is the provision of an allowance for qualified counsellors in recognition of their financial contribution to their qualification and ongoing mandatory annual CPD in counselling.

### **2019 Indecon Review of Career Guidance**

The Indecon Review of career guidance demonstrates a strong understanding of the complex nature of the work of guidance counsellors. It also demonstrates an awareness of the role-overload on the practitioners and the challenge to keep abreast with a constantly changing external environment. Access to labour market intelligence is rightly identified as problematic for guidance counsellors. It recommends that specialist guidance practitioners be allocated to groups of schools on a regional basis so serve as a source of detailed sectoral information on labour market development and on employment, and work experience and apprenticeship programmes. There is much merit in this recommendation. The primary concern of the ASTI is that irrespective of the host organisation for such as service, all schools must have equal access to it.

The recommendations on work experience and enterprise engagement require further consideration in terms of ongoing redevelopment of the senior cycle curriculum, the development of diverse pathways and post-school transitions. The ASTI's 2023 submission also highlighted additional concerns particularly in relation to the proposal to devolve this work to local employers. This proposal is neither a practical nor an acceptable solution. It is not practical because employer interests are not necessarily uniform across the country or indeed consonant with the wider social project of schools. It is not acceptable because both activities are embedded in the curriculum and teachers are the professionals in this regard. What is needed to support effective engagement with both activities is reduced time tables for teachers, more posts of responsibilities, adequate professional time to support ongoing curriculum change and, of course, a lower allocation ratio for guidance counsellors.

### **Overall observations**

Overall, the model of WSG guidance in the draft Guidance is of a high standard – and rightly so. The key issue for the ASTI is the time available to all school personnel to engage in the whole school approaches as envisaged. While the appendices provide comprehensive guidance, the ASTI is concerned that the majority of classroom teachers will not have the time to realise the various activities. Another issue is the capacity of the current guidance counselling service – both in terms of personnel and knowledge base/skill set – to engage with ever-evolving post-school training and employment opportunities.

## Specific observations

**1.3 - Activities:** the examples in Appendix 1 do not include what is a universal aspect of guidance counsellors daily work, namely, conducting/assisting in educational assessments and supporting the work of the SEN team – as well as other school team for whole-schools services, e.g., pastoral care.

**2.3.1 and 2.3.2 - WSG Team and Plan:** both of these models have significant human resource implications. In the absence of additional guidance counsellor allocation to schools and school leadership posts they are largely aspirational for the majority of schools. The requirement to engage in an annual review of the WSG Plan could become very significant in the context of any future evaluation model of the service.

**2.4.5 – All School Personnel and Subject Departments:** The key issue for teachers as regards these requirements is that of time notwithstanding the comprehensive set of examples in the various appendices.

**3.1 – Guidance Programme:** This model is based on current good practice. However, there are two areas where guidance counsellors will require support and information, namely, pathways, career exploration and transitions. The post-school education and training landscape is changing in response to exponential technological and skills demands and guidance counsellors must have access to information and CPD in these areas.

**4.8.1 – An Effective Model of WSG Programme:** This section is helpful in terms of school self-evaluation and external evaluation.

## Concluding observations

The guidance counselling service is multi-dimensional in second-level schools. It responds to the needs of individual students across multiple domains while at the same designated as a whole-school activity. This dual function is not in itself problematic. Schools are complex organisations and roles are constantly evolving in response to curriculum and policy changes. What is problematic is the inadequate numbers of guidance counsellors in schools to discharge these roles. This results in students' developmental and educational needs being unmet. It also results in unsustainable workload and a declining attractiveness in the post of guidance counsellor.