

ASTI SUBMISSION:

REVIEW OF CAREER GUIDANCE

May 2018

Introduction

The ASTI notes that the current review is focused on career guidance in schools in line with commitments in the National Skills Strategy and Action Plan for Education 2011-19. There is no doubt that such a review is necessary in the current era which has been defined as one of 'industrial revolutions and societal transitions'. (ETUI, 2018) However, an exclusive focus on only one of the three dimensions of guidance in second-level school is, in the opinion of the ASTI, a flawed approach to this vital area of young people's education. Young people leaving school must not only be aware of the rapidly changing nature of work: they must also have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be successful lifelong learners. While acknowledging the need to develop additional career guidance resources, the ASTI would strongly recommend that the holistic, developmental focus of the current guidance and counselling service in schools remain central in future policy.

Guidance and Counselling form an integrated service

The Irish guidance and counselling model is an integrated model comprising seven guidance activities. Counselling. (NCGE, 2017) They are counselling; assessment; information; advice; educational development programmes; personal and social development programmes; and referral. Counselling is considered a transversal activity in that, at its most fundamental, it enables students to make choices. Guidance counsellors are professionally qualified in line with the Core Competencies and Professional Practice requirements of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and as set out in the DES Course Recognition Framework (DES, 2016) They are highly qualified practitioners and have a wide set of professional responsibilities as set out in the Framework. (Appendix 1)

The Department of Education & Skills defines guidance in schools as:

"a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but inter-related areas of personal, social, educational and career guidance". (DES, 2005)

This holistic focus on the spectrum of developmental needs of young people is consonant with the broader aims and objectives of second-level education as expressed in legislation, curriculum and Departmental guidelines.

One-to-one guidance counselling

One-to-one guidance counselling is a particularly valued dimension of the guidance counsellors' role. This model of service provision is under acute stress due to the high levels of mental health problems, anxiety and stress among young people. (Government of Ireland, 2017) However, one-to-one engagement with students is not confined to counselling. It is equally central to career guidance which is aimed at enabling students to develop the skills to make choices based on self-awareness, self-management skills and appropriate knowledge. The dramatic reduction in this aspect of service provision has impacted on career guidance as much as on the counselling dimension.

Problems in current service delivery

Austerity measures have had a major deleterious impact on the guidance and counselling service in schools. This is evidenced in several pieces of research over the austerity decade. The 2016 Institute of Guidance Counsellors' survey found that since September 2012, guidance counselling service provision had been reduced by 27% in schools and by 30% in DEIS schools. One-to-one counselling had been reduced by 53.5%. (IGC, 2016) These findings have been confirmed in ASTI research in 2013. One year after the abolition of the ex-quota allocation of guidance counsellors to schools, 45% of schools had reduced counselling but maintained levels of career guidance; 43% gave priority to career guidance needs of senior cycle students; 30% reduced career guidance but maintained counselling. Only 22% of schools reported no change in service provision. 70% of schools stated that they had reduced one-to-one counselling. (ASTI, 2013) It is of note that the Department of Education & Skills Circular Letter, 0007/18, on the approved allocation of teaching posts to schools acknowledged that schools had maintained just 75% of guidance counselling practice hours as result of 2012 budgetary decisions.

The qualitative research conducted by the NCCA on a curriculum framework for guidance in 2007 provides further important insights into current service delivery. (NCCA, 2007) Two central themes emerged from the research– the significant resource implications of making further progress in a collaborative approach to guidance and the tension between the curriculum and service dimensions of any guidance programme. Each of the schools has said that it would like to do more, and some are keenly aware of where gaps in their provision exist. Resource constraints were paramount.

Guidance service and educational disadvantage

ESRI research has consistently shown that access to, and availability of, career guidance varies according to the socio-economic status of students. (ESRI, 2006, 2011(a)) The longitudinal ESRI study is particularly valuable because it focused on the extent to which students attributed their career and education choices to formal career guidance at school, including guidance classes or one-to-one sessions with their guidance counsellor, visits to colleges or universities through open days or a guest speaker at their school who gave them valuable advice or information. (ESRI, 2011(b)) For all students, parents are seen as a key source of information and influence upon a young person's career choices. Over three-quarters of sixth year students surveyed considered their mothers and fathers important or very important influences on post-school plans. However, working class students are more reliant on guidance counselling for advice as their families or communities do not have access to social capital or 'insider knowledge' of labour market opportunities or advantageous post-school education and training routes. The fact that guidance counselling service provision has reduced most in DEIS schools is therefore of great concern.

Students' experience of guidance counselling service

ESRI research

There is strong evidence as to the value and impact of the guidance counselling service on students' decision-making in relation to post-school choices. The ESRI (2011(b)) research found that, on the whole, students were satisfied with the guidance they received, while at the same time expressing the desire for more information on the pathways open to them. Positive aspects of guidance were seen to include the range of information provided, the commitment of the guidance counsellor, the use of aptitude tests, access to guest speakers and attending college open days. Students appear to be more satisfied with individual sessions with their guidance counsellor than with guidance counselling

classes, with some students describing these sessions as ‘very helpful’ in reaching their career decisions. This finding underpins the point made above in relation to the one-to-one counselling.

Across all schools, however, some students reported being disappointed with the level and nature of provision. Constraints on the time available to meet with the guidance counsellor were cited by many students, especially in contexts where counsellors were ‘juggling’ subject teaching, guidance and personal counselling. Some students felt that there was an over-emphasis on college applications in their guidance classes and not enough attention was given to alternative options such as apprenticeships or employment.

An important issue emerging from the study relates to the timing of guidance provision. Given constraints on guidance allocation, many schools focus guidance provision on senior cycle, especially sixth year, students. As a result, some students reach sixth year without realising that their prior choices have limited the future options open to them. Thus, decisions made as early as first year can have negative consequences for post-school choices. In this context, the prioritisation of guidance as one of the four ‘pillars’ of the junior cycle Wellbeing Programme is an extremely important development.

PISA 2012

Ireland was one of the few countries which opted in to the 2012 OECD PISA section exploring the experience of 15-year-olds’ participation in career development activities and attitudes towards schooling. (Elnaz et al, 2016) Across all selected case-studies, a strong relationship emerged between participation in career development activities and more positive attitudes to the utility of schooling. This effect was strongest in Ireland and Finland. The most consistent positive effects related to speaking to a careers’ advisor in school and attending a job fair. Table 1 below provides an overview of students’ reporting participation in career development activities in the case-studies.

	Internship	Job shadowing or work-site visit	Taken part in a Job Fair	Spoken to a Careers Adviser at my school
Australia	49%	30%	52%	66%
Belgium	11%	20%	15%	30%
Canada	9%	34%	40%	40%
Denmark	69%	52%	25%	94%
Finland	62%	43%	38%	84%
Ireland	7%	39%	11%	52%

(Elnaz et al, 2016)

Question 1: How can career guidance tools and information for students be improved?

The most important resource in career guidance is the guidance counsellor. The guidance counsellor is indispensable in enabling students to access career guidance tools, understand their contents and make decisions. The research literature on the impact of ICT in education is pertinent in this regard. There is now an emerging consensus that, in terms of embedding digital learning, the role of the teacher is crucial. Analysing data from PISA 2012, the OECD concluded that teachers are just as central to ensuring learning online as in the traditional classroom. Thus, while new devices/ICT may help teachers create these conditions, the principles of effective learning are the same whether computers are involved or not. Learning requires time and practice, and is most rapid when driven by the

learners' needs, and is effectively supported by social interactions. (OECD, 2014) The guidance counsellor is key to such interactions, especially in the context of supporting the student's overall developmental needs. Ambitious policy for career guidance into the future will simply not work if schools do not have adequate numbers of trained guidance counsellors on their staffs.

The ASTI has repeatedly called for the full restoration of the guidance counsellor allocation to schools. It is also strongly of the view that allocation criteria need to be revisited entirely, given the current role overload, the demands of the junior cycle wellbeing programme and ongoing policy changes.

ICT in career guidance

Online career guidance tools and information are increasingly utilised in schools to support career guidance. The feedback to the ASTI is that these tools are increasingly user friendly and tailored to the full spectrum of learners' needs. The primary problem as regards ICT in guidance is not the quality or relevance of the software but, rather, the lack of time for guidance counsellors to assist students in navigating this software, extracting relevant information and making appropriate choices. Guidance counsellors are confident and competent in the use of this software but frequently state that 'competition' for the computer room with other teachers means that opportunities for accessing online career guidance tools is limited.

Question 2: How do learners form opinions on around career choices?

Evidence-based policy

This is an important question. Do we know how young people form opinions around career choices? Do we have an evidence base from which to develop policy? The ASTI is strongly of the view that we need dedicated research in this area given the exponential nature of change in the labour market. The 2017 Accenture Report on Girls in STEM provides some important insights into how learners form opinions around career choices. (Accenture, 2017) The report found that both boys and girls are strongly influenced by their parents who don't necessarily have accurate information on career choices. It also found that students' personal interests play a significant role in choosing a career. Classroom teachers are also influential in developing such interests and nurturing them into an ambition for a career in a cognate area.

The research suggests that learners form orientations and attitudes to the world of work in primary schools. It is of note that the English Framework for Careers and Work Related Education is aimed at 7 to 19 year olds. Learning about careers is also strongly informed by students' own work experience of paid employment. ESRI and other research indicates that activities such as careers' fairs, visits to workplaces, guest speakers, visits to industry events, etc., are valued by students.

Support the subject teacher

The policy of the Department of Education and Skills is that there must be a whole-school response to meeting the guidance needs of all its students. Subject teachers are highly influential on students' overall interest in, and attitudes to, subjects. Their knowledge and expertise is referenced in the 2005 DES Guidelines as an important dimension of the overall career guidance experience of students. However, this area is not unproblematic. Subject teachers do not necessarily view their role as that of career guidance, nor have knowledge of post-school pathways or labour market. It should also be stated that subject teachers were not provided with professional development opportunities to support the introduction of a whole-school guidance approach. It is simply not realistic to expect teachers to consciously embed career guidance into their subject teaching without providing ongoing and relevant professional development.

Curriculum is central

The Wellbeing programme in the junior cycle has prioritised guidance counselling as one of the four 'pillars' of the programme. This is a welcome development. However, the ASTI must again reiterate its core recommendation that we need to increase the number of guidance counsellors in schools for this programme to be effectively implemented.

The current review of senior cycle education represents an important opportunity to embed career guidance into the senior cycle curriculum. An important focus in this review is that of pathways to post-school education, training and employment. A specific engagement with the NCCA and its school network is required on the how best to embed career guidance in future curricular programmes. The LCVP programme currently provides a model of good practice in its two Link Modules on preparation for the world of work and enterprise education. Similarly, work experience in the Transition Year and LCA programme are valued by students but some evaluations have questioned how integrated this experience is into the school guidance plan.

Overall, it would be true to say that students' experience a fragmented career guidance experience overall. Much of the latter is focused on the process of applying for third level education with significantly less attention to further education and apprenticeships. This situation is sustained by two established factors: the role of the Leaving Certificate examination as the generator of points for access to college and role overload for guidance counsellors. The status of further education and training and the opportunities for work-based learning is increasingly acknowledged as a major issue.

Question 3: Enhancing enterprise engagement?

As we learned from the consultation process for the development of the STEM education policy, there is a strong tradition in second-level schools of 'enrichment' activities which enhance learning; provide information on future careers; and give students access to role models in different career areas. The role of the media in disseminating information about these activities is also very positive. The experience in Ireland of school-industry partnerships is long established through curriculum developments such as the Transition Year work experience, alternative Leaving Certificate programmes, mini-companies, Young Scientist, Sci-Fest, etc. A key factor in the success of such partnerships is the agreed focus on providing educational experiences to young people. A similar precept should apply to partnerships for supporting enterprise engagement around career guidance. Activities which are perceived as having an overly industry-specific focus will not motivate teachers – largely because the former will not be perceived as being of assistance in the classroom.

An acknowledged weakness of the many enrichment projects previously referred to is the fact that they depend on individual teachers' information and enthusiasm. Policies need to be promoted which sustain this enthusiasm while building better system capacity. Teacher learning is the key. Measures to support teacher learning could include financial support to teacher education institutions to reduce costs for teachers: financial supports for further learning for individual teachers via scholarships; funding for research by teachers – especially action research in their schools; support for the activities of teacher professional networks; research into students experiences of, and aspirations, including a gender and broader diversity focus.

Conclusion

Career guidance has always been a central feature of the overall school guidance and counselling programme. The resource constraints on schools have created significant role overload for the practitioners and have led schools to make decisions on how best to deploy limited resources. Future policy for career guidance should build on the holistic developmental focus of the current service.

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