Institute of Guidance Counsellors

Response to the Proposed Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers of Initial Education Programmes in Guidance Counselling

APRIL 2015
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) welcomes the initiative taken by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in commencing a discussion on the content of future initial training programmes for professional guidance counsellors and, the intention of the DES (1. Context pp.4-5) to present “new criteria and standards for Providers of initial training programmes in guidance counselling who intend for graduates of their programmes to work in guidance services under the remit of the DES”.

These initiatives mirror the concerns and ongoing work of the IGC as it continues to review the future competence requirements of the professional guidance counsellor to meet client needs in changing socio-economic, cultural and global contexts.

Quality Training In Counselling

The IGC believes that the common theme in definitions of guidance counselling referenced by both the DES and ourselves, that young people and adults can be enabled ‘to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society’ National Guidance Forum, 2007, p.6, can only be fulfilled if the initial training programme includes an emphasis on quality training in counselling.

The Value of Guidance Counselling to Irish Society

The IGC believes that guidance counselling, can be a cost-effective benefit, delivering real economic and social benefits to society.

Changing societal, work and global perspectives require that guidance counselling is seen as an important enabler of educational and employment policies and, in particular, that the training of guidance counsellors which demands such high standards of professionalism, becomes a central component of the public policy and planning process in education.

Competences

The IGC embraces the following internationally recognised definition, which views competency as the ability to ‘identify requirements in complex situations and to solve complex tasks through the activation of specialist knowledge, skills, experiences, feelings, values, interests and motivations and to act independently and purposefully according to the analysis of the situation. Competence further comprises the ability to (self-) critically reflect and assess one’s activities regarding the situation and results, in order to learn from future challenges’ (OECD 2003, Weber 2013)
Framework of Competences
The IGC competency framework, reflecting good international practice, describes a dynamic model which sees the self of the guidance counsellor as the central component to the practice of the core professional competences of guidance counselling. The client–counsellor relationship, which is central to the work of the guidance professional, has implications for the training provided.

The IGC believes it is important to recognise that there are sector specific practice competences as outlined in our diagram and that these are incorporated into training programmes.

The IGC is concerned that lacking in the definition of competency as outlined in the DES document is an understanding of the holistic nature of guidance counselling and the centrality of counselling skills as a core competency.

Training – Knowledge and Skills
The key training components as envisaged by the IGC are set out under the headings of:
Counselling/ Personal & Social Contexts / Assessment / Education / Sector Specific Practice / Career / Professionalism.

Competency Training Framework
The IGC operates a best practice competency framework which it would wish to see incorporated in the initial education programme:
(i) initial Core Skills and Competency training in guidance, counselling and psychometrics;
(ii) Sector specific competencies (e.g. second level, adult, third level etc.) developed through supervised activity and training required for accreditation and
(iii) specialist competencies developed through ongoing practice, CPD, counselling specialisation and or further study.

Selection of Course Participants & Training Pathways
The IGC welcomes the selection criteria and, for specific reasons, the rigorous selection procedures proposed; it suggests that ‘the prior practical experience’ required, be introductory training in a model of counselling. Other points include:
Entry levels to be minimum NFQ Level 8.
Exit level postgraduate guidance qualification at NFQ Level 9, to include the counselling component minimum 60 hours counselling skills training, (specifically for counselling) during both the initial Core Skill and Competency training (generic) and during sector specific supervised training practice.
Psychometrics must constitute an integral part of the generic training at both Levels A and B.
Sector specific practice training is outlined to include an emphasis on reflexive client work.
Mentoring person to be professionally qualified in guidance counselling and professionally
accredited. Emphasis on micro-skills acquisition. Rigorous evidence of practical skills mastered, i.e. tape-work. Outlining of minimum hours required critical to training proposals and objectives.

**Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**
As the professional body, the IGC sees continuing professional development (CPD) as essential for all guidance counsellors and outlines what it sees as required.

**European View of Guidance Counselling**
The IGC endorses the goals as outlined in the *Handbook for the Academic Training for Guidance and Counselling Professionals* (2012) in the vision for the future direction and development of the guidance counselling profession in Europe, and in particular, that it addresses the urgent need to professionalise guidance counselling.

It should be kept in mind that the IGC defines training in terms of both the *generic* level of training and, for practice, the further *specific sector specialisation*, in theory, knowledge and skill competencies.

**Roles and Relationships in the Context of Whole School Guidance**
Finally, the IGC addresses a key issue to be considered when drawing up an initial training programme for guidance counsellors working in educational facilities recognised by the DES. While the IGC acknowledges the Department’s reference, p.4, to ‘the multifaceted role of all guidance counsellors’, the IGC’s policy regarding roles and relationships, outlined in the Institute’s document: *A Whole School Guidance and Counselling Service and Curriculum: Roles and Relationship*, clarifies the dynamic interaction between the service and the curriculum components in the whole-school model of guidance counselling delivery and points out the importance of a clearly defined remit for the guidance counselling service for an effective delivery of interventions to meet the personal, social, educational and career needs of students.
Introduction

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) welcomes the initiative taken by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in commencing a discussion on the content of future initial training programmes for professional guidance counsellors and, the intention of the DES (1. Context pp.4-5) to present “new criteria and standards for Providers of initial training programmes in guidance counselling who intend for graduates of their programmes to work in guidance services under the remit of the DES”.

These initiatives mirror the concerns and ongoing work of the IGC as it continues to review the future competence requirements of the professional guidance counsellor to meet client needs in changing socio-economic, cultural and global contexts.

The IGC, whose members are recipients of past training courses and who will be mentors of future practitioners, represents the professional body in Ireland and thus has a particular expertise and stake in the outcome of this consultative process.

I. Definition of Guidance Counselling

Fundamental to the consideration of future initiatives is clarity on what guidance counselling can deliver. In Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications for Section 9 (C), we read, “The guidance and counselling process aims to help students to develop an awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities; to explore possibilities and opportunities; to grow in independence and to take responsibility for themselves; to make informed choices for their lives and to follow through on those choices”\(^1\).

In further underlying the holistic nature of the service and the integration of personal, social educational and vocational guidance counselling the document also states that, “Counselling is a key part of the school guidance programme, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis. Counselling has as its objective the empowerment of students so that they can make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing. Counselling in schools may include personal counselling, career counselling, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these.”\(^2\)

The IGC believes that the common theme in the two quotations referenced on p.6 in 1.4 Guidance Counselling: definitions and activities, of young people and adults being enabled through guidance counselling to ‘develop self-management skills’ (DES, 2005, p.4) and, ‘to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices so that they reach their full

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\(^1\) Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9(C)............p.5

\(^2\) Ibid. p.4
potential and contribute to the development of a better society’ National Guidance Forum, 2007, p.6, can only be fulfilled if the initial training programme includes an emphasis on quality training in counselling.

All these definitions above, taken together, are a sound basis for our discussion of the training, knowledge and skills required by the professional guidance counsellor of the future as they engage with young people and adults.

Furthermore, the definitions have evolved to take account of today’s complex work environment where people are balancing and coping with the demands of family life. Professional guidance counselling helps clients to develop skills and coping mechanisms to deal with difficulties and stresses effectively. Not only that, the IGC believes that guidance counselling, can be a cost-effective benefit, delivering real economic and social benefits to society.

The common thread through the above definitions is enabling the person to become self-directive thus reducing their likelihood of engaging in what has become known as the ‘revolving door’ syndrome.

Guidance counselling, delivered professionally, enables individuals facing the challenges of an increasingly knowledge-based society to develop emotional competency, resilience and maturity, essential precursors to the development of vocational competence and maturity.

In particular, guidance counselling focuses on enabling the client not only to face immediate problems, but to learn key skills to enable him or her to be able to cope with the ongoing changing perceptions and the nature of work which are arising out of globalisation and continuing scientific and technological advances.

Moreover, in economic terms, guidance counselling can assist the efficient operation of the labour market in three ways:

- By supporting the individual decisions through which the labour market operates.
- By reducing some of the market failures of the labour market
- By contributing to institutional reforms designed to improve the functioning of the labour market³

Changing societal, work and global perspectives require that guidance counselling is seen as an important enabler of educational and employment policies and, in particular, that the training of guidance counsellors which demands such high standards of professionalism, becomes a central component of the public policy and planning process in education.

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³ Economic Benefits of Career Guidance, NICEC, 1992
II. Definition of Competency

The IGC observes that the definition of core competencies as outlined in the DES document pp 4, 5, 7 and 9 do not fit with our understanding of core professional competencies. We concur with the following internationally recognised definition, which views competency as the ability to ‘identify requirements in complex situations and to solve complex tasks through the activation of specialist knowledge, skills, experiences, feelings, values, interests and motivations and to act independently and purposefully according to the analysis of the situation. Competence further comprises the ability to (self-) critically reflect and assess one’s activities regarding the situation and results, in order to learn from future challenges’ (OECD 2003, Weber 2013)

III. Professional Competences

The IGC competency framework, reflecting good international practice, describes a dynamic model which sees the self of the guidance counsellor as the central component to the practice of the core professional competences of guidance counselling. While an essential element is the underpinning theoretical knowledge and the acquisition of the necessary skill base for the development of the core professional and practice competences, the client – counsellor relationship is central to the work of the guidance professional which, of course, has implications for the training provided. The framework devised by the IGC is best understood as a feedback loop system in which, following initial generic training and skill development, and the development of sector specific practice competences, the professional is engaged in skills acquisition and maintenance through CPD, supervision and advanced training, appropriate to the context of service.

Figure 1 IGC Competency Framework
Figure 1 illustrates (i) Core Skills and Competency in guidance, counselling and psychometrics; (ii) Sector specific competencies (e.g. second level, adult, third level etc.) (iii) Specialist competencies developed through ongoing practice, CPD, counselling specialisation and or further study.  

While the DES Proposed Criteria and Guidelines acknowledges that there are different service settings (p.6, last paragraph), the IGC believes it is important to recognise that there are sector specific practice competences as outlined in our diagram above and that these should be incorporated into training programmes.

We list below the theoretical knowledge and skills base considered essential in the generic training of all guidance counsellors which has been developed by the IGC through a detailed review of international practice.

IV. Training – Knowledge and Skills

Mindful of the complex issues affecting Irish citizens of all ages such as emotional stress, mental wellbeing and health, depression, inter-personal relationships within the family, examination anxieties, etc., the training must equip guidance counsellors to enable their clients to face personal challenges and learn new skills. Ireland has a global-oriented economy with international companies bringing in new work practices and indigenous companies trying to manage new challenges, all of which impacts on present and future employees. Guidance counsellors have a central role in helping young people and adults prepare for new roles in this context. Training must take cognisance of these new demands and be resourced adequately. Within these parameters, the IGC puts forward its carefully thought-out training programme:

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4 Vision Document, IGC, 2013, p6
# Training - Knowledge and Skills

## Counselling
- Theories and Models of Counselling
- Counselling Skills, Reflexive Practice & Process
- The Counselling Relationship
- An Understanding of the Nature of Groups and Group Work

## Personal & Social Contexts
- The Psychology of Human Development
- Career Development Across the Lifespan
- Mental Health & Well Being
- Multiculturalism, Social Contexts, Diverse Populations and Work Contexts

## Assessment
- Psychometric Tests and Measurement - Principles & Practice
- Ability, Aptitude
- Appropriate Behaviour Assessment
- Self-Report Tools -Interest, Personality, Values
- Qualitative Career Assessment Measures

## Education
- Knowledge of Education & Training Pathways
- National & International Systems

## Sector Specific Practice
- Planning & Implementation
- Practice Management & Record Keeping
- Guidance Counselling Processes & Approaches
- Guidance Counselling Interventions
- Pre & Post Guidance Counselling Evaluation
- ICT

## Career
- Theories of Career Development Across the Lifespan
- The Nature of Work
- Global Perspectives
- Career & Labour Market Information

## Professionalism
- An Understanding of and Adherence to Ethical Practice
- Further Education and Training
- Continuous Upskilling & Professional Development
- An Understanding of Professional Boundaries & Self Care
- Legislation Relevant to the Practice Context
IV. Training Framework

Figure 2: IGC Competency Training Framework

Figure 2 Illustrates (i) initial Core Skills and Competency training in guidance, counselling and psychometrics; (ii) Sector specific competency development & training (e.g. second level, adult, third level etc.) developed through supervised activity and training required for professional accreditation with the IGC and (iii) specialist competencies developed through ongoing practice, CPD, counselling specialisation and or further study.  

Selection of Course Participants & Training Pathways

In reviewing Sections 2.2 Selection of course participants and 2.3 Learning and teaching experiences, the IGC makes the following points:

1. We welcome the selection criteria outlined on page 9. In keeping with the understanding that the client-counsellor relationship is core to practice, we welcome in particular the rigorous selection procedures proposed.

2. We would suggest that ‘the prior practical experience’ should constitute evidence of training in a model of counselling, such as Basic Reality Therapy or other introduction to counselling training courses.

3. The IGC considers that the level of training currently proposed is inadequate to meet the professional training needs of guidance counsellors. The entry levels need to be minimum NFQ Level 8. As the DES requirement for working in an educational establishment constitutes a teaching qualification and experience, it follows that the appropriate initial

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5 Vision Document, IGC, 2013, p6
generic training level for guidance professionals should be at least at postgraduate NFQ Level 8 and exit following sector specific training at NFQ Level 9.

4. In addition to the minimum entry level requirement of Level 8 to training, the generic (Core) theoretical training of all guidance counsellors needs to comprise the Core Guidance Counselling Competencies as illustrated. A glaring omission in the framework is the lack of specified hours training to be undertaken by students in each of the knowledge and skills section. This needs to be remedied.

5. A minimum of 60 hours training in counselling skills by those undertaking the generic skills training in guidance counselling is required, as well as client tape work, in addition to the preliminary training in a model of counselling as indicated in no 2, above.

6. Assessment is a core competency of the professional guidance counsellor, and therefore, we consider it essential that psychometrics constitute an integral part of the generic training of the guidance professional at both initial generic (Level A) and specific sector (Level B) training levels.

7. On completion of sector specific competency training and supervised practice it is recommended that exit levels of counselling training be at NFQ 9. In addition, candidates will have obtained psychometrics level B.

8. Sector specific practice training will involve completion of requisite mentored & supervised practice hours and individual client contact time with an emphasis on reflexive client work.

9. A satisfactory mentor/student experience may well demand extra physical office space, in the school, and, most certainly, extra time to be given over to tracking the student’s progress and away from the regular duties of the mentoring guidance counsellor. Assistance in compensating the school for those hours lost needs to be considered by the Department of Education and Science.

10. We consider it essential that the mentoring person has professional qualifications in guidance counselling and is a professionally accredited guidance counsellor. This is to ensure that the trainee guidance counsellor is exposed to the full range of guidance counselling activities as outlined in the Theoretical Knowledge and Skills template, (see p.7) and the core competencies, knowledge and skills critical to the practice of the specific sector.

11. Critical to training proposals and objectives is the outlining of minimum hours needed for each of the areas listed in the knowledge and skills framework proposed in the diagram.

VI. Discussion

Proposed Course Recognition Framework

In its stated aim (p5) the CRF sets out criteria and standards of initial programmes. As indicated above, it is noted the ‘competences’ listed in the introduction on p4 relate to ‘practice’ skills, and do
not include the core generic professional competences of guidance counselling as required by the professional practitioner. In particular, what is lacking is an understanding of the holistic nature of guidance counselling and the centrality of counselling skills as a core competency. (See our proposed level of hours required in this area – point 4 above)

As the professional body, the IGC sees continuing professional development (CPD) as essential for all guidance counsellors. As already pointed out, we live in times of change across socio, economic and cultural contexts and so the IGC supports the points made in section 1.5.3 regarding post-qualification professional development and is pleased to note that the DES intends to continue funding guidance counselling supervision – an essential element of a professional guidance counsellor’s CPD.

However, the IGC wishes to emphasise the need for CPD provision in the specific area of counselling skills; supervision alone would not suffice.

Questions for Consultation

In Section 3.4.2 of the DES document, it seeks views on the appropriateness of the criteria set out in Section 2 of the document. In the light of its considerations above, the IGC makes the following brief points:

i) National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Award Level and Type

Entry level 8 (qualified teacher status) leading to a NFQ Level 9 postgraduate guidance training qualification

ii) Selection of Course Participants

- As stated above, we welcome the selection criteria outlined on page 9. In keeping with our understanding of the client-counsellor relationship as core to practice, we welcome in particular the rigorous selection procedures proposed.
- In addition, we suggest that ‘the prior practical experience’ should constitute evidence of training at an introductory level in a model of counselling, such as the Basic Reality Therapy or other introduction to counselling training courses.

iii) Learning and Teaching Experiences

- Where feasible it would be preferable that the trainee does not carry out practice in the same venue as their normal place of work.
- The absence of micro skills training, particularly in counselling and psychometrics is evident in this document.
- Psychometric Level A & B should be an integral part of the training of the guidance professional and not a later add-on post-training.

iv) Assessment of Learning

- Evidence that participants are adept in counselling skills at an advanced level by the completion of the specific practice competency training is a requisite. At a generic level,
this should be at a very minimum as per the recommendations of the Committee of Directors of Studies in Guidance Counselling.  

- Tape work needs to constitute part of guidance counselling training for the development of reflexive practice

v) **Qualifications of Programme Staff**
- All programme staff must be qualified specialist and competent in their field
- Mentors for the specific practice training component must be experienced guidance counsellors, hold professionally recognised qualification(s) in guidance counselling and be members of a recognised guidance counselling professional body and involved in CPD practice.

vi) **Required Competences (and associated ECTS) presented in Table 1.**
- The IGC present in the table above the generic core knowledge and skills base essential to the training of the guidance counsellor. Foundational to the development of the future professional is the required emphasis on counselling and assessment skills.

vii) **Additional Criteria**
No comment here

viii) **Section 3.4.3 Seeks other comments:**
The IGC believes the following points must be considered when developing a framework for guidance counselling initial training:

**Guidance Counselling in a European Context**

**A. Goals**
The IGC note the documents reference to the work of the *Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE)*. The *Handbook for the Academic Training for Guidance and Counselling Professionals* (2012) identifies, amongst others, the following goals in the vision for the future direction and development of the guidance counselling profession in Europe, and in particular, addresses the urgent need to professionalise guidance counselling:

i) the need for the establishment of a recognised profession;
ii) clarity in relation to practitioner roles and functions;
iii) the development of a competence framework;
iv) the definition of competence standards;
v) the linking of knowledge and skills to professional values and attitudes
vi) the link between competence standards as a basis for professional training

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6 Committee of Directors of Studies, ‘Counselling Competencies for Guidance Counselling Education Programmes: Interim Guidelines’ March 2011
7 Network for Innovation in Career Guidance and Counselling in Europe (NICE) Heidelberg University, 2012
Mindful of the definition of guidance counselling outlined earlier, the IGC welcomes the above goals identified in the NICE project, many of which also reflect those articulated in the professional body’s own *The Vision Document*, for the development of guidance counselling in the Irish context. (IGC, October 2013)

vii) the development of a clearly defined qualification framework, of training guidelines and of pathways with recognition of prior learning

**B. Skills and the European Model**

It is essential that the guidance counsellor should be seen to possess identifiable specialist skills. Establishing qualification standards in the future necessitates looking at the set of *core* and *sector specific specialised competencies* required by guidance counselling personnel within specific settings.

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors draws attention to the model of guidance counselling practice as described in NICE, which, modelled as it is on a European understanding and approach, differs from that practised in Ireland, where the emphasis is on the whole person. In setting out a training and competency framework, NICE notes national variation in approaches and consequent training requirements. This needs to be a consideration when relying on international and European studies as a model of good practice. The IGC define training (Figure 1 above) in terms of both the *generic* level of training and, the depth of *specific sector specialisation*, in theory, knowledge and skill competencies.

**Roles and Relationships in the Context of Whole School Guidance**

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors acknowledges the Department’s reference on p4 to ‘the multifaceted role of all guidance counsellors’. The concept of coordinating service and curriculum applies in any educational environment. The IGC’s prior recognition of this is evident in our document of 2008 as this applies to second level schools. In this document the Institute outlines the distinction and the interconnection that exists between the curricular elements of guidance counselling in educational institutions and the professional guidance service provided by the guidance counsellor. The IGC’s policy regarding roles and relationships in the context of whole school guidance is clearly outlined in the Institute’s document: *A Whole School Guidance and Counselling Service and Curriculum: Roles and Relationships*⁸. *(Please see the table below)* This document clarifies the dynamic interaction between the service and the curriculum components in the whole-school model of guidance counselling delivery and points out the importance of a clearly defined remit for the

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guidance counselling service for an effective delivery of interventions to meet the personal, social, educational and career needs of students⁹.
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