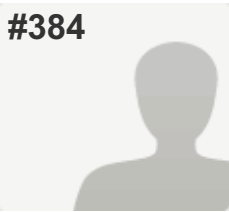


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PAGE 1: Please complete this consultation paper in respect of your area of interest and/or expertise

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Q4: 1(a) What improvements can be made within existing resources

Professionally trained, highly qualified and accredited Guidance Counsellors are already employed in all but six second level schools and colleges of further education in Ireland (IGC, 2016). This resource is not being maximised to its full capacity and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) believes the restoration of the ex-quota allocation that existed pre the 2012/13 academic year would be greatly improved the delivery of the guidance counselling service to students, as per the current agreed programme for government 2016-2018. In doing so, the guidance counsellor would be relieved of classroom duties with regard to subject teaching and other classroom duties, free them to provide the necessary, personal, educational and vocational support and encouragement to all students in all schools.

Since 2011/12, in terms of overall practice hours, DEIS schools have experienced a 30.0 percent loss of guidance hours, non-DEIS schools a 26.7 percent loss, and fee-paying schools have gained 1.9 percent. Overall, there appears to be a socio-economic hierarchy to the provision of hours for guidance counselling, where those who can afford to pay for it receive the greatest benefit. Guidance counselling is on its knees, with guidance counsellors in 2016 not given time to perform the role to the best of their ability that they were trained to do. Harkin (2015) found that the demand for personal counselling in schools under the Free Education System (FES) forced prioritisation, with preventative work disappearing. This has resulted in the guidance service becoming a reactive crisis intervention one.

Q5: 1(b) What improvements can be made through new provision

The following new provision is required:

1. Affirm the statutory commitment to the holistic model of guidance counselling, delivered by a professionally qualified guidance counsellor, as envisaged under Section 9 (c) of the Education Act, 1998;
2. Restore and ring-fence pre-2012 ex-quota allocation hours under the pupil-teacher ratio, so that the time lost to students for personal, vocation and educational one-to-one counselling is reinstated;
3. Place an onus on school management and principals to deliver such a service in second level schools, colleges of further education and adult education, with clear agreement on minimum levels of service provision between the DES, Management Bodies, and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors;
4. Commit towards fully restoring the dedicated responsive guidance counselling services that collaborates with and intervenes on behalf of each student whose immediate needs, concerns, or problems are distracting or impeding his or her academic, career, and/or personal and social development.

By implementing the above provision, guidance counsellors could once again:

- a. Improve and protect the positive mental health of our students;
- b. Provide appropriate and individual career and vocational counselling, resulting in students' being empowered to make the appropriate college and vocational choices needed, which would significantly reduce college dropout rates, which according to latest published figures stands at 1 in 6 students (ESRI, 2014; HEA 2016) and reduce the number of our young people transitioning directly from second level education on to the live register;
- c. By reinstating the "Guidance Enhancement Initiative" (DES,2001), the guidance service would once again be in a position to:
 - Develop and nurture relationships with local employers and colleges through networking, career events and career days, visiting speakers, practice interviews and work experience initiatives;
 - Promote the uptake in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) subjects and information technology (IT) subjects at second level and encourage students with aptitude into careers grounded in these subjects;
 - Identify students at risk of early school leaving and to support them to transition from second level into third level.

DEIS schools had previously been in receipt of additional guidance resources through the Guidance Enhancement Initiative; and The Economic & Social Research Institute Report, "Learning from the Evaluation of DEIS" (Smyth et al. 2015) had highlighted that its abolition was likely to lead to even greater difficulties in combining the educational guidance and personal counselling elements of the guidance counsellor role in the context of reduced resources (Smyth et al., 2015).

Q6: 2. Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

The partial restoration of 300 Guidance Counselling posts to second level schools is a positive step to “enhance guidance counselling”, however, due to a lack of definite guidelines in the Spring 2016 Allocations Circular to school management, these hours are not being used for their well-intended purpose. This is resulting in a disjointed, inequitable hit and miss delivery of the guidance counselling service in schools. School autonomy is a failed mantra as evidenced by the damage that has taken place from 2012/13 to 2015/16, as highlighted by the results of the IGC Audit 4 (IGC, 2016).

It needs to be affirmed to school principals that the reduced pupil-teacher ratio should be used exclusively and in its entirety for guidance counselling provision –ex-quota and ring-fenced for it to be protected. This is the only thing that the current inequality nationally in guidance counselling delivery will be addressed in schools in the FES who are being forced to abandon guidance and counselling due to competing demand, and who do not have the luxury of other funding that the fee-charging sector benefit (Harkin, 2015).

The proposed new in-quota allocation system delegates to individual principals the final decision as to whether the hours will be allocated for guidance use, or alternatively for one of the myriad of other competing demands for resources in any school. The subjective view of each principal will hold sway for what is seen as the most important call on resources for each individual school, with the guidance counsellor being placed in the position of having to compete for hours with the Maths or the Science departments.

International Research

Internationally, empirical research has evidenced that when individual school principals are given the final decision on providing guidance, guidance suffers. In the article in the Guardian newspaper, Education Correspondent (Sheppard, 2011) described one secondary school in England where “only teenagers with special needs are to be given careers advice” and conveyed warnings from the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) in the UK that careers advice for young people was becoming extinct, with ICG members fearing a further rise in the number of NEETS (teenagers not in education or training).

In a damning assessment of the new statutory duty for schools to provide careers guidance, an official OfSTED report found that it was “not working well enough” as only 12 of the 60 schools inspected had ensured that “all students received sufficient information to consider a wide breadth of career possibilities” (OfSTED, 2013).

Research further found that changes to the careers advice system in England had created a service with “profound gaps” (Simms, Gamwell, Hopkins, 2014), highlighting that some schools were directing their students to websites to do all their own research because they knew that providing good careers advice was not crucial to pass government school inspections.

Internationally research proffers that the policy of devolution of responsibility for guidance provision to individual school principals has been tried and tested in a number of countries in recent years, such as the England and Wales, New Zealand and The Netherlands. Empirical research has found increased inequality of access to guidance information and a huge variability in career learning experiences for students, together with a lack of quality assurance and negative perceptions by students and parents of the service.

In summary, the main difficulty with devolving responsibility for guidance to schools is one of subjectivity, where “some managers may see guidance as being very important for the institution and its students [and] some may not” (McCarthy, 2012).

In order to ensure schools are using the additional resources for guidance counselling delivery, there needs to be an annual national audit of guidance counselling provision in all schools and colleges of further education, conducted by the Department of Education (DES). With only one guidance inspector, it is very difficult to ascertain how this can be undertaken and achieved by the Inspectorate.

Q7: 3. Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

The DES should consider the following when developing the 2016-2018 Strategy:

1. Ring-fenced hours for guidance service provision be provided by all schools' principals in second level schools, colleges of further education and adult education;
2. Request that the school returns to the DES ensure that the guidance allocation is fully delivered for the purpose it is intended. This will ensure the schools implement DES policy re the restoration of Guidance Counselling as per Budget 2016;
3. Insist that Guidance Counselling is delivered by a fully qualified professional guidance counsellor, who is highly skilled and trained in line with DES guidelines, and who is continuously upskilling and engaging in continuous professional development (CPD) and attending DES supported counselling supervision;
4. That the requirement for subject teaching be removed from guidance counsellors, allowing them to perform their primary role;
5. That one-to-one counselling hours be provided as a matter of priority;
6. Ensure a minimum level of guidance provision for all schools, colleges of further education and adult education settings is agreed between DES, IGC and management bodies as opposed to the laissez faire ad hoc current system under the schools' autonomy policy;
7. Provide enhanced hours for DEIs schools, above the minimum agreed level;
8. Provide a commitment to continuously improve the quality of guidance counselling in our schools, colleges of further education and adult education, using professionally qualified guidance counsellors.

What will these changes achieve?

- a. Facilitate all students to maximise their talents and abilities, regardless of their gender, social background or ethnic origin by providing one-to-one support to enable them to finding opportunities that can maximise their talents, and overcome the barriers to accessing these opportunities;
- b. Deliver a dedicated school-based professional guidance service where one-to-one counselling is a life-line that offers a chance in life to students struggling with mental health issues, disability, and social disadvantage;
- c. Widen access participation for all students by providing them with career management skills that are available to them over the lifespan of education;
- d. Support the radical changes required to implement the strategic goals and objectives of Further Education and Training (FET), i.e. Reformed Junior Certificate, Apprenticeship Training; Generic Entry Routes;
- e. Support the government's equity goals on the integration of immigrants and refugees into employment and training; reducing gender segmentation in the labour market; reducing the impact of family advantage upon educational and labour market outcomes, and increasing social cohesion.

Q8: 4. How should success on achieving our strategies be measured.

1. To verify that schools are using resources for guidance, an annual national audit of all schools needs to be conducted by the DES.
2. With only the one guidance inspector for the entire country there is no way the Inspectorate can be expected to verify this.
3. To measure productivity in a transparent and accountable professional way, the IGC has developed and piloted a new online system as discussed with Ministers Jan O Sullivan and Damien English. Titled "Mindaclient", it is a new online service to manage appointments and clients, developed in conjunction with SalesPulse.

How can it help the Guidance Counsellor to be more accountable and transparent in their work?

1. Set up a database of clients
2. Tailor and record relevant client details
3. Record appointment times in an online diary
4. Send automatic appointment text reminders to clients if desired
5. Keep a confidential record of appointments, including counselling notes
6. Generate a print out of activities for auditing purposes

How does it work?

- a. Login onto website www.mindaclient.com
 - b. Set up a database of individual clients or groups; online video tutorials to help
 - c. Set up appointments online with clients, a text / email can automatically be sent to client if desired
 - d. Generates a weekly calendar of appointment times
 - e. Keep confidential records of meetings with clients
 - f. Accessible at all times from a computer, tablet or phone
 - g. Print out activities / reports / audit as required
 - h. Sp 24/7 access to training videos
 - i. No software to install
 - j. Automatic reminders to clients about appointments if desired; limits the number of no shows
 - k. Prevents double booking
 - l. Text / email clients if desired
 - m. Select all clients who have not made an appointment for a while to remind to make one
 - n. Instant analysis of client activity
 - o. Easy to use reporting & auditing
 - p. Mobile service; can be used on your computer, tablet, smartphone
4. Guidance Counsellors show more accountability and transparency in their work by logging all appointments on a data base, which would include the nature of appointments and outcomes of same;
 5. Qualitative and quantitative research be undertaken in order to measure improvements in student attrition rates, school and college completion rates, mental health incidents, uptake on PLC and apprenticeship courses, and measuring transitions to live register to assess outcomes.
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Q9: 5. Comment on any issues relating to the continuum of education and skills, in addition to your particular area of interest and/or expertise

1. Resources to form more links with third level support services to address college drop-out rates;
 2. Invest resources to reduce class sizes;
 3. Increase subject options;
 4. Language support for foreign students;
 5. Upgrade IT equipment in teaching.
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Q10: 6. Any other observations that you would suggest the Department should consider in the formulation of our strategy for education and skills 2016 - 2018

Enforcement of Education Section 9(C)

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Q11: 1(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Following on from the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), and the NCGE aim for lifelong guidance in education and employment in Ireland, there needs to be a career guidance input at primary school level;

Provision of counselling support and encouragement for primary school students, so as to prepare them for the successful transition to second level, together with supporting positive mental health.

Q12: 1(b) How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

Above to be measured by undertaking empirical qualitative and quantitative research.

Q13: 1(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. Lifelong guidance and positive mental health;
 2. Promoting a culture of asking for help.
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Q14: 2(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We support the Government's awareness of the need for cultural change to bring about prevention and early intervention of mental health issues for the next generation. We commend the Government's Connecting for Life, and Ireland's National Strategy for Suicide Prevention in the Programme for a Partnership Government. It is necessary, however, to provide additional investment in current guidance counselling staff who are best placed to access risk and instigate outside referral to the General Practitioner (GP) and appropriate external agencies. While providing a substitute service, it is not sufficient to buy in outside agencies or invest extra resources in this area as they are not directly engaged with students during critical incidents or on a day to day basis.

It is evident that the use of external providers for counselling is ad-hoc in nature and it appears that schools are placed in the position that they will recruit both paid and voluntary providers, wherever they can be sourced, in order to deliver a service (IGC 2016). While it is acknowledged on behalf of the schools that this solution to the now evident gap in the provision of service is with the best intent, what is been ignored is the absence of an overarching quality system to determine the qualification of service providers, their service standard, and their Garda Clearance levels. The use of this practice is high risk for students and there is a serious need to address it as a matter of urgency.

Q15: 2(b) How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?

Qualitative and quantitative research be undertaken in order to measure improvements in student attrition rates, school and college completion rates, mental health incidents, uptake on PLC and apprenticeship courses, measuring transitions to live register, etc.

Q16: 2(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. IGC needs to have a voice on the national taskforce on Youth Mental Health, as students are unlikely to access support services voluntarily. Research by the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) has found that students in disadvantaged schools, lack the 'insider' knowledge through the family networks available to their middle-class peers and appreciate and are more reliant on formal school-based guidance (Smyth and Banks, 2012; McCoy et al., 2010).
2. Equal access for All students in All schools and colleges of further education to their guidance counselling service.
3. Currently, since the removal of the dedicated guidance counselling service from second level schools, and colleges of further education and adult education in Ireland in September 2012, empirical research had evidenced the dramatic detrimental impact of the changes on all students in general, and DEIS schools in particular:
 - a. Schools overall in 2015/16 are providing 17.76 hours per week, down from 24.54 hours in 2011/12 – a loss of 27.6%.
 - i. DEIS are providing 15.80 hours – a 30.0 % decline;
 - ii. Non-DEIS are providing 18.44 hours - a 26.7% decline;
 - iii. Fee-paying are providing 24.0 hours – a 1.9% increase.
 - b. 5.6% of schools receive no allowance for guidance counselling from the general school allocation and are providing 9.1 hours per week;
 - c. 2.4% of schools have no qualified guidance counsellor employed at all;
 - d. Overall, 85.9% of employed qualified guidance counsellors are practicing;
 - i. 81.6% in DEIS schools;
 - ii. 87.2% in non-DEIS schools;
 - e. Overall, 14.1% of employed qualified guidance counsellors are not practicing;
 - i. 18.4% in DEIS schools;
 - ii. 12.8% in non-DEIS schools.
 - f. Impact of Loss by School Types: 2015/16:
 - i. Community/comprehensive schools lost 32.7 per cent;
 - ii. Voluntary secondary schools lost 29.6 per cent;
 - iii. ETB schools/colleges lost 27.0 per cent;
 - iv. Colleges of further education lost 6.6 per cent;
 - v. Fee-paying schools gained 1.9 per cent
 - g. One-to-one student work has dropped from 12.0 hours to 5.59 hours per week, which represents a catastrophic decrease in service of 53.5 per cent. DEIS schools spend on average:
 - i. 1 hour less on one-to-one student work, and
 - ii. 1 hour less on other guidance counsellor activities, including administration,
 - h. Sixty-three schools report using 106 unqualified persons to deliver guidance on a weekly basis;
 - i. 6.1% of schools use external providers for guidance;
 - j. 28.2% of schools use external providers for one-to-one counselling by 17 diverse groups/organisations are used by 40.8% of schools, with no overarching quality and evaluation system in place;
 - k. In 2016 and 2015, 8.1% of students made no CAO choices for tertiary education, compared to 1.3% in 2007 (DES, 2015), with a mammoth 649% increase in the number of students making no CAO choices at all (DES, 2015);
 - l. In 2012, the drop-out rate for first-year tertiary students' averages from 16% (Universities) and 25% (IT), 19% for males and 13% for females, with students citing guidance counselling at second level key to how they managed their first year (HEA, 2015);
 - m. By 2012, registration on apprenticeship courses has declined from 6,763 to 1,307 (HEA, 2015);
 - n. In 2012, only 90% of second level students sat the leaving certificate examination; and 82% of students in DEIS schools (DES, 2015);

We believe that concerted efforts must be made to tackle these issues. In this context, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors is proud to play a significant part in meeting the challenge of rebuilding and restoring the dedicated responsive guidance counselling service that existed prior to Budget 2012, a service that had clear benefits for students, parents/guardians, business community, society and government.

Q17: 3(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Significant strides are being made to address this issue in general, however we still have a situation where access for young people to their guidance counsellor is piece meal and fragmented, depending on the type of school they attend and whether or not their parents can afford to pay for a private guidance counsellor.

The following issues for parents still need to be addressed:

1. Equal access to schools of their choice
2. Equal access to learning support
3. Equal access to College
4. Adequate assistance with HEAR, DARE and SUSI applications from the guidance counsellor

Audit 4 (IGC, 2016) found disjointed unequal access to guidance counselling across all school types. When a comparison was made of which school types had the greatest loss in terms of hours from 2011/12 to 2015/16, community/comprehensive schools had the greatest loss at 32.7 per cent; voluntary secondary schools lost 29.6 per cent; ETB schools/community colleges lost 27.0 per cent; colleges of further education a declining loss of 6.6 per cent; while fee-paying schools gained 1.9 per cent, a possible reflect fact that guidance counselling is now being privately purchased by 22.2 per cent of all fee-paying schools.

Harkin (2015), a doctoral research study, reported similar finding and suggesting three possible reasons; firstly, that fee-paying schools are able to access additional sources of finance and funding that are not available to schools in the FES; secondly, that parent power had an impact on decision-making around guidance services, and thirdly, that both school management and parents in fee-paying schools regarded guidance (particularly career guidance) as important.

Q18: 3(b) How should progress on Diversity and Choice for Parents be measured?

Active engagement with parents, feedback, evaluation and research.

Q19: 3(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Time provision for parents to meet with guidance counsellor to discuss students' issues, transitions, choices, learning outcomes and progress reports.

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Q20: 4(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Progress has been made at policy level to improve the apprenticeship model, with the promise that the number of apprenticeships be doubled, however much work is needed to improve the transparency and access to an apprenticeship for our young people on the ground, as outlined in the 2013 Review of the Apprenticeship Training in Ireland document.

At national level the IGC have strong direct links with Higher Education Institutes (HEI), Forfas, Industry, IBEC and SOLAS. On the ground, guidance counsellors organise and deliver work experience/ placements, careers days, mock Interview, workshops, speakers and information seminars. The IGC are constantly upskilling and engaged in CPD to stay abreast with employment trends and labour markets needs, so as to guide students towards meaningful employment.

Q21: 4(b) How should progress on Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools be measured?

Ongoing follow up and monitoring of graduate destinations.

Q22: 4(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. The present government have made a commitment that: "Guidance Counselling at second level will be enhanced" in the Programme for a Partnership Government. The government now needs to honour that pre-election promise, and restore full ex-quota hours to guidance and counselling to pre-Budget 2016 levels;
 2. The government needs to ensure that fully trained and qualified guidance counsellors are employed as case workers in INTREO officers nationwide. Furthermore, a continuum of support and guidance for employees in the workplace, mentorship and appropriate assistance by qualified personnel should be established.
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Q23: 5(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The IGC are delighted to read that the present government has committed to invest "An extra €300million in capital funding between Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta to allow them to provide additional support to Irish owned enterprises. This extra funding will give Local Enterprise Offices and incubation centres additional resources to help support start-up situations and small businesses across the country", under a Programme for a Partnership Government;

For additional matters please refer to 5c.

Q24: 5(b) How should progress on Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students be measured?

1. By the number of second level students expressing to their guidance counsellor an interest in working for themselves before or during transition year;
 2. By the number of individuals who have the temerity to set up their own business, instead of going straight to third level on an annual basis;
 3. By the number of individuals who succeed in their business and go on to create employment for other individuals, pay taxes and contribute to the exchequer;
 4. By the number of individuals who are energised to give something back by engaging with transition year students through work experience/placement programmes, speaking at careers days and events in their local schools, HEI's, etc.
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Q25: 5(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. Give guidance counsellors the appropriate resources to allow them to interface with and support our budding entrepreneurs at this initial and critical stage, and then to network with the appropriate mentors/professionals on their behalf;
 2. Remove some of the obstacles e.g. the requirement to hire legal and accounting professionals, or else subsidise this requirement so that it is affordable for start-up situations;
 3. Offer tax breaks to entrepreneurs, remove the tax penalty i.e. higher rate of PRSI that self-employed people currently pay;
 4. Offer financial support and a safety net to entrepreneurs who do not succeed in their business. If you wish to motivate people to set up their own business why penalise them financially when it does not work out? Sometimes it pays off to offload an unworkable business and start over;
 5. Look at best practice in the US where Sole Proprietors can declare themselves bankrupt and start over. Entrepreneurs by their very nature can re-invent themselves and are not crippled by failure, however there are presently too many obstacles in their way in this country to make it a feasible vocational choice. We need entrepreneurs, we need to support them and offer them financial assistance every step of the way, especially in areas where Forfás are illustrating through their excellent research that we have a gap in the labour market;
 6. Why not also have a mentorship system in place for young entrepreneurs? This process needs to start in transition year where already our students are expressing the desire to work for themselves and are verbalising sound business ideas which could meet a need in society. The present education system does not cater sufficiently for entrepreneurs and sucks the energy out of their ideas by 6th year, hence we are losing good resources.
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Q26: 6(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The IGC recognizes positive steps which the government propose they will put in place. “We will also reduce primary school class sizes; reintroduce guidance counselling to secondary schools and increase financial supports for post graduate students with a particular focus on those from low income households”, in a Programme for a Partnership Government. However, we would recommend that guidance counselling not only be reinstated to its pre-Budget 2012 condition, but that it be further enhanced to allow qualified and supervised guidance counsellors to do the work that they are qualified and experienced in, given that the population of second level students is increasing, and given that the range and intensity of mental health issues presenting at our doors is growing out of control.

We would like to take this opportunity to remind this government that we offer added value in that we are subject and career neutral, we are holistic in our approach and both our training and our practice keep us grounded and up to speed with current labour market developments. At National Executive level we have close links with Forfás, CIF, SOLAS, IBEC. Guidance counsellors attend CPD at least 6 times annually. We hold a post graduate qualification in Guidance and Counselling, with many of our members are qualified to Masters level. In addition to this central aspect of the guidance counsellor role, the majority have upskilled substantially in the area of counselling. We are well aware that we are not therapeutic counsellors, however the intensity and range of counselling issues presenting at our doors requires that we increase the range and level of our counselling as often as time and resources allow.

We are already qualified and able to:

1. Identify students' abilities, aptitudes, interests, values, intelligence type and guide them towards the optimum fit both educationally and vocationally;
2. Promote and organise vocational events tapping into to local employers, HEI's, PLC's;
3. Promote STEM and ICT subjects and vocations;
4. Promote apprenticeships and support suitable students in the application process which they currently find challenging;
5. Identify students at risk of dropping out of school or tertiary level courses, and support them through the appropriate educational choice given the unique challenges and gifts each student brings with them;
6. Prevent critical incidents by having the time and access to students to engage in preventative counselling and to nip problems in the bud;
7. Referring students on to their GP, supporting the student and parent in this process, and ensuring it happens in a timely manner

Instead of investing in NEP's who come on stream after the critical incidents have occurred, we should firstly be examining how can we prevent critical incidents in our schools. Given the long-term emotional distress, vicarious trauma, copy-cat culture, insidious destructive role of social media, the disruption to young people's welfare, sleep, concentration and education which are the result of critical incidents, we need to do a lot more to prevent them where we can.

The personnel are already on the ground in every school nationwide who can do much to reduce the impact of critical incidents, i.e. the guidance counsellor. However, if a guidance counsellor is in a classroom, or a corridor supervising and not in their office when a troubled teenager comes seeking help, or their stressed out friends come seeking advice on their behalf, this is a huge waste of a resource and a lost opportunity. Research shows that students are more comfortable confiding in a familiar face e.g. their guidance counsellor than to an adult they do not trust or feel comfortable with i.e. someone from outside of the school community. Also, it is well documented that teenagers will not necessarily come back a second time to seek help if their first attempt is fruitless. Young people think in the present tense and feelings can often be overwhelmingly negative, particularly for those struggling with anxiety and depression. If we are not present and available when they come knocking, they may interpret that as “s/he does not care”, or “I don't deserve help.”

Q27: 6(b) How should progress on Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities be measured?

By monitoring the number of students:

1. applying for tertiary level courses in STEM and ICT courses;
 2. the number of students who complete these course and choose to take up employment in these are;
 3. the number of students signing up for apprenticeship courses;
 4. the reduction in critical incidents in schools;
 5. the number of referrals out to GP and other mental health agencies from guidance counsellors; and
 6. the number of students who seek personal counselling from their school or college guidance counsellor.
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Q28: 6(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. Reinstate the guidance and counselling function in educational institutions nationwide with immediate effect;
 2. Put in place further enhancements e.g. the Guidance Enhancement Initiative which would afford us the requisite time to:
 - a. support the government and its agencies e.g. Forfás in communicating labour market information to students and their parents;
 - b. continue to work at local level to strengthen and maximise connections with local employers and higher and further educational institution;
 - c. cater for the rising population of second and third level students; and
 - d. attend to the growing range and intensity of mental health issues presenting at our doors.
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Q29: 7(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

It is encouraging that “The new government is committed to ensuring that all 18-year-old school leavers with intellectual and physical disabilities have continued education and training opportunities, under the Programme for a Partnership Government. Due to the 20% increase in DARE applications and the additional time required to complete the DARE form, the government needs to set aside an additional allocation for guidance counsellors to be used to guide and support students through this complex and highly sensitive process.

Special needs students require significantly more support and input by their guidance counsellor than their peers. Exceptionally able students often experience mental health issues and are as in need of resources and support from their guidance counsellor as those experiencing physical disabilities or learning difficulties, however their needs are currently sidelined even though we invest 1.4 billion annually in special needs education.

Q30: 7(b) How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

Track the educational progression of students experiencing special needs.

Q31: 7(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Invest a substantial allocation of time to guidance counsellors to empower them to guide and support students through the comprehensive DARE application process. Invest some funding and resources in the Exceptionally Able. This will pay dividends to our economy, especially if we can retain these students here in either appropriate research or employment. There has been very little investment in research at tertiary level in recent years, yet there is much international research to support the thesis that countries who invest in research have stronger economies.

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Q32: 8(a) Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

We commend the government's Pathways to Work 5 Year Strategy opportunities and their pledge to reduce the unemployment rate to 6%. Guidance counsellors have a large role to play in achieving this aim given our counselling expertise, our grasp of labour market issues and our daily access to the future workforce of the nation. Given the emphasis the current government places on STEM subjects and ICT, a move to restore the Guidance Enhancement Initiative would seem like a logical choice given that guidance counsellors are ideally poised both to promote these subjects in their schools and to maximise work experience and workshop possibilities with local employers.

Q33: 8(b) How should progress on Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future be measured?

1. Reduction in the unemployment rate;
 2. Reduction in emigration rate;
 3. Increase in entrepreneurial activity in the country;
 4. Increased investment in indigenous industries.
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Q34: 8(c) What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

1. Restore the full ex-quota allocation to guidance counsellors with immediate effect, to allow practitioners to match the workforce of tomorrow to labour market needs;
 2. Given that (a) student numbers are increasing, (b) mental health issues are increasing – both in number and intensity and, (c) strong informed advocates of STEM and ICT are urgently required, an allocation in excess of the pre budget 2012 allocation would now be more appropriate.
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