

**Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) response to the call for submissions by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) on the review of existing career guidance tools and career information for students and adults, and to recommend changes to improve the tools and information currently in place across the education and training system in Ireland.**

**(May 2018)**

# The TUI represents teachers, lecturers and staff in out of school services (18,000+) employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), voluntary secondary schools, Community and Comprehensive (C&C) schools, Youthreach and institutes of technology. Close examination of all relevant data indicates that schools in the ETB and C&C sectors enrol, by far, the largest proportion of students with special needs and coming from areas of educational and economic disadvantage. ETB schools are two to four times more likely to be designated DEIS as other school types (DES statistics, 2018). In the case of third level, there is also evidence of a class divide. For example, almost a quarter of students in UCD and Trinity College attended fee-paying schools, compared to less than one percent in some IoTs (Irish Times, May 18th 2018).

**Background**

Ireland has an internationally acknowledged, high-performing education system (Teaching Council, 2010; OECD, 2013; DES, 2018; OECD, 2009; NAPD, 2016; Comhairle na nOg, 2017, Growing Up in Ireland, 2017, IPSOS MRBI Trust in the Professions Survey, 2017; Boyle, 2017) despite spending relatively little on education (OECD, 2015).

The cuts to guidance services in schools, colleges of further education and in the adult education sector which occurred over the last decade have had a tremendously detrimental effect on the support which can be given to students, especially those at risk of educational disadvantage such as early school leaving and additional needs. As stated by the IGC (2016a: 1),

“Since September 2012, **guidance counselling provision has experienced an overall cut** to service provision of the order of 27.6%, 30% in DEIS schools, and a catastrophic 53.5% reduction in one-to-one counselling. The service has been decimated.”

Guidance counsellors help to prevent early school leaving so it is important to note that “the latest available EU figures showed that in 2016 11% of all 18 to 24-year olds in the EU28 member states were classified as early school leavers. The Irish equivalent rate was 6% in the same period. This ranked the country seventh lowest among EU member states” (CSO, 2018a: 5). The Department of Education and Skills also calculates the early school leaver rate in Ireland as being significantly lower than peer countries (DES, 2017a). In fact, in 2015, people in Ireland aged 15-64 were 1.48 times more likely to have a degree than to be educated only to lower secondary level or below (CSO, 2018b). Early school leavers are three to four times more likely to be unemployed than those who complete upper secondary school (Irish Times May 13th, 2009). This has implications for private and national income. SJI (2018: 4) has reported that “those whose education ceased at lower secondary or less carry a one in four chance of being poor; the risk is less than half this for those with a third level qualification”.

Healy et al. (2018:176) found that

“Ireland ranked second in EU28 for the percentage of people aged 20-24 with at least upper-second level education at 91.2 per cent. However, while the gap between retention rates in DEIS and non-DEIS schools has halved since 2001, it still stands at 8.5 per cent. This means that the rate of early school leaving in DEIS schools stands at 15.6 per cent. Ireland’s early school leaving rate must also be viewed in light of a very high NEET rate. In 2016, Ireland’s NEET rate among 20-34 year olds was 18.5 per cent, slightly higher than the EU28 average of 18.3 per cent. Young people aged 25-29 were the worst affected, with 19.4 per cent NEET.”

Full restoration of the six hundred posts in ex-quota guidance removed in 2012 has still not happened. A further one hundred and fifty posts were also recently lost from the guidance enhancement initiative which started approximately fifteen years ago. One of the three principles of the guidance enhancement initiative was to prevent early school leaving.

As cited by AEGAI (2018: 1)

“as stated by the Solas FET strategy “the Adult Guidance Service enables individuals and (therefore) communities to achieve their developmental, personal, social, career and employment aspirations. Guidance facilitates the acquisition of Career Management Skills and benefits employees throughout their working life.””

AEGAI (2018) states that Adult Guidance Service met 52,000 beneficiaries annually with a cost to the State of just €125 per beneficiary. Furthermore, the 2012 operational guidelines meant that “some changes were introduced, which include AEGI staff working with 16-18-year old’s as a new target group” (AEGAI, 2018: 3).

As well as providing career guidance, guidance counsellors in school and adult settings also often find themselves providing emotional support to students. Ryan (1993) found that many counsellors provide advice to students on a wide range of problems relating to family, sex, social and emotional development, bullying, unreasonable academic expectations, and alcohol and drug abuse. Guidance counsellors in schools are also responsible for subject teaching. Furthermore, guidance counsellors spend significant amounts of time involved in critical incident teams, liasing with outside agencies and keeping up to date with new developments in further and higher education.

Ireland has a very young population (Eurostat, 2015). In 2008, we had the second highest proportion of 10-14-year olds in the European Union (CSO, 2009). The high birth rate in Ireland (CSO, 2017; Eurostat, 2017) indicates that the population of young people is likely to remain high for the foreseeable future. The DES (2012, 2017b) suggests that the number of students in the post-primary system will rise by almost one hundred thousand between 2011 and 2025 (322,528 to 416,897). In this context, it is not sufficient to suggest that a world-class out of school support system can be sustained with inadequate resources of time, money or personnel.

As stated above, guidance counsellors often spend considerable amounts of time liasing with outside agencies to ensure that students who are encountering difficulties can access support from relevant agencies. Many of these support services are vital if a student who is experiencing difficulties is to be adequately supported. For example, in 2015, less than half of the recommended 127 specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) teams had been established, 472 children in care did not have a social worker, 673 children in care did not have a care plan whilst there are 8,161 child protection cases which had not been allocated a social worker including 2,829 deemed ‘high priority’ (Children’s Rights Alliance, 2015). Furthermore, in a study of 33 countries, Ireland had the seventh highest ratio of students to school psychologists i.e. 5,298:1 as opposed to 927:1 in Denmark for example (Jimerson et al., 2009). The average in the study was 3,709:1. For Ireland to reach a reasonable rate of 2500 students per psychologist, taking into account demographic group, would require the employment of 267 more psychologists by 2021 (Impact, 2015). In 2017, there were 2,767 children waiting for a first appointment with CAMHS whilst Ireland has the fourth highest incidence of teenage suicide in the European Union (Children’s Rights Alliance, 2018). This is all within the context that during 2014, the then TUSLA Chief Executive publicly stated that the Agency required additional funding of €45 million ‘just to stand still’ (Irish Times December 30th, 2014). Indeed, TUSLA (2018) stated that

“While additional funding has been agreed for 2018, significant additional funding will be required for 2019 and 2020 to continue to grow Tusla as a self-sufficient organisation. It will also be important to be able to continue to respond to new Government policy and legislative requirements as they emerge.”

The crisis in provision of support to students with mental health needs were starkly illustrated in the 2017 Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Children’s Mental Health services. Some of the key points outlined in that report were:

* Ireland has the fourth highest teenage suicide rate in the developed world. The report further highlighted that Irish children aged between 11 and 15 are the second highest in Europe presenting with emotional issues on a weekly basis.
* At the time of writing this Report, there are 2,818 children waiting clinical assessment by a consultant child psychiatrist in Ireland. Some 218 of those children have been on that waiting list for over a year. This is largely due to the fact that there are insufficient numbers of child psychiatrists.
* Of the recommended 127 specialist CAMHS teams, only are 67 teams in operation and even then not all are operating to full capacity.
* Funding for mental health services made up just 6.1% of the HSE’s total operational budget. This is significantly less than the recommended 8.24%.
* At the end of 2016, 1,500 vacant posts exist in the HSE’s mental health division operational plan.
* Only 8 out of 17 weekend mental health services are in operation around the country.

As noted in Crosier and Donkova (2017),

“mental health problems develop early. Research shows that 50 % of adult mental health problems start before the age of 15 and 75 % of [before the age of 18](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhealth/849/849.pdf). A 2015 [project on mental health](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4378028/) in schools in Europe found that around 10 % of school students aged 6-11 had problems requiring mental health care. To put this another way, in every primary school classroom there are on average two or three children with a mental health issue. And to complete the distressing picture, a disproportionate number of teachers are also suffering from mental health problems. In the UK, [a 2017 survey](https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/sites/default/files/education_staff_health_survey_2017.pdf) found that 75 % of teachers reported a physical or mental health issue related to work in the past two years, compared to 62 % in the overall working population.”

**Recent Cuts**

A TUI study (2012), conducted by Behaviour and Attitudes gathered extensive data on the impact of the budget cuts on schools and students. In a sample of 88 schools close to a quarter (22%) reported that the level of pastoral care had been reduced by September 2012 and 19% reported reductions in guidance provision. Following the decision to withdraw provision for ex-quota posts many more schools reported expected reductions in these critical areas from September 2012 - 63% reported an expected reduction in guidance provision and 50% reported an expected reduction in pastoral care services. Later detail provided by schools confirmed that this drastic reduction in these essential services has become a reality. The allocation of a year head (from the reduced pool of senior posts) to each year group, seen by many as the key to strong pastoral care systems, is now a luxury in most schools. 70% of all respondents in the study (283) ranked the resulting negative impact on support and welfare services to students as high but management felt they had little choice.

Percentage schools reporting a reduction in pastoral care and guidance and counselling support (Source: Internal TUI Study, 2012)

A smaller, localised study across 12 schools on the east coast paints the reality that arises from the removal of ex-quota provision for guidance. By September 2013 half of the schools involved had reduced discrete provision for guidance and counselling by over 50% and one third had reduced it by over 60% (the highest reduction was 85%). Just one quarter of the schools surveyed had retained discrete provision for guidance at over 80% of the original allocation. At the time of the study one school indicated it no longer had a guidance counsellor. Feedback also flagged that some guidance provision was now general in nature and delivered by non-specialist teachers or guest speakers.

Additional data and commentary from personnel in these schools showed that within the discrete time allocated to guidance work, many guidance counsellors are now expected to concentrate on delivering guidance to whole class groups.These trends have also been identified by a recent independent national study (LifeCare Psychological Services) in 240 second level schools which found that the amount of time guidance counsellors are spending on timetabled class room activity has increased by 19.8% which can include curriculum guidance, subject teaching, SPHE and other activities.

Both studies emphasised the provision for one-to-one support sessions as the biggest casualty of the removal of ex-quota guidance posts. The LifeCare Psychological Services study found a 51.4% reduction in the time available for one-to-one student counselling with guidance counsellors struggling to fit this in around timetabled and other commitments. The highly specialised expertise of the guidance counsellor and the ‘necessary confidential space’ are, therefore, no longer readily available to students who need individualised, high support to deal with personal issues and/or career advice. Individual sessions are by necessity restricted, often reserved for the extreme case that presents after a student has already endured significant personal distress or trauma. Notably, some guidance counsellors are not facilitated in attending their personal supervision sessions; an essential to ensure best practice. In addition, the guidance counsellor can no longer assign time to core planning or co-ordination activities that support other staff with less specialist expertise in working with students.

A 2013/14 study by TUI found that

* 42% of surveyed schools/centres experienced an increase in student numbers but a decrease in guidance provision.

The modal reduction was 41-50%.

* 94% of guidance counsellors were facilitated to attend supervision.
* 93% of guidance counsellors were sometimes or always facilitated to attend appropriate CPD
* In 30% of cases, non-guidance staff were carrying out guidance and counselling work.

In three fifths of those cases, external personnel were involved. In two fifths of cases, other staff members were assigned to guidance and counselling work.

* In 86% of surveyed schools/centres, the number of guidance classes were increased, but in 93% of schools individual/group sessions were reduced. 91% of guidance counsellors spent less time than previously talking to stakeholders about subject choice, and 100% spent less time talking about programme choice.
* In response to a question about the capacity of qualified guidance counsellors to respond to situations:

37% were “not at all satisfied” with their ability to respond to the immediate needs of individual students,

25% were “not at all satisfied” with their ability to respond to crisis situations,

29% were “not at all satisfied” with their ability to support general pastoral case activity.

* 39 schools/centres (sample size 124) had no displacement of guidance by curricular subjects.

5 of those schools/centres under 250 students i.e. 13% but the overall sample had 7% small schools so larger schools/centres being hit disproportionately.

* Only 3 of the 124 schools/centres had at least 11 hours per week of guidance and counselling provision provided by a qualified guidance counsellor.
* 14 schools/centres spent more than 11 hours per week (over and above allocated hours) to the delivery of the guidance service.
* 34 schools/centres in 2013/2014, and 30 in 2012/2013, had allocated non-guidance personnel to address shortfalls in guidance and counselling work.  In 5 schools/centres, these extra personnel had to provide 11 or more hours to fill the gap.  In one case of a school of over 750 students, it was 35 hours.  In 5 schools it wasn’t possible to quantify as arrangements were ad hoc, informal, not timetabled and sometimes voluntary.

IGC (2016b: 4, 5) states that

“there has been a reduction of 53.5% in time for one to one counselling. It also highlights an overall reduction in the service of 27.6%, with significant variations among school types (IGC, 2016). When looked at in terms of the overall loss between 2011/12 and 2015/16, 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. Overall, only 85.9% of employed qualified guidance counsellors are practicing while, at the same time, sixty-three schools reported using 106 unqualified persons to deliver guidance on a weekly basis; and another 6.1% of schools used external providers for guidance and 28.2% of schools use external providers for one-to-one counselling. Seventeen diverse groups/organisations are used by 40.8% of schools, with no overarching quality and/or evaluation system in place to monitor this situation.”

Research conducted by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE, 2013) on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills, a similar guidance service reduction of 26% was found, resulting in the NCGE recommending to the DES that "the ex-quota allocation for guidance in schools should be restored as a priority".

Harkin (2015) found that the removal of ex-quota impacted negatively on care in second level schools, but that experience differed by school type. Fee-paying schools were able to access additional sources of finance and funding; that parent power had an impact on decision-making around Guidance services; and that both the school management and parents regarded Guidance, particularly career guidance, as important.

In the context of access to third level and retention in third level, the Chief Executive Officer of the HEA has stated that “we also need to ensure that there is adequate guidance and information at second level” (Irish Independent May 18th 2018). As cited in IGC (2016a):

“Previous Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) research found that young people attending disadvantaged schools are significantly less likely to go on to higher education than those attending middle-class or socially mixed schools (McCoy et al., 2014; DES, 2013). In more middle-class schools, the focus is not on whether to go on to higher education but on which college and which course (Smyth and Banks, 2012; McCoy et al., 2010); while in contrast, students in disadvantaged schools, lack the 'insider' knowledge through the family networks available to their middle-class peers and are more reliant on formal school-based guidance.

This finding is supported by the 4th Audit (IGC 2016b) which found practice hours for fee-paying schools increased by 1.9% from 2011/12 to 2015/16, while schools in the FES decreased by 26.7%, and in DEIS schools, by 30%. DEIS schools had previously been in receipt of additional guidance resources through the Guidance Enhancement Initiative; and the ESRI 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).”

A survey carried out by the ASTI in 2013 found that

"as a result of the abolition of ex-quota guidance counselling provision in schools in September 2012, 78% of schools have made changes to their guidance counselling services. Of particular concern to the ASTI is that 7 in 10 schools have reduced the provision of one-to-one guidance counselling for students"; and that "almost 60% of Principals stated that the moratorium on posts of responsibility (in-school middle management posts) has had a high adverse impact on the wellbeing of students".

Guidance teams need to have time to meet and discuss plans as well as existing difficult personal cases. Furthermore, the often sensitive nature of counselling means that guidance counsellors need time to debrief e.g. as currently pertains on Tuesday afternoons.

**Tools, Projects and Resources**

Many useful tools, projects and resources have been communicated to the TUI. A sample is presented below.

*ICT*

ICT is excellent for accessing guidance information, research and collating data.  Students are also creating guidance folders to build up their own library of relevant data. This starts with first year groups where the school guidance counsellor is timetabled for one class weekly under the well being umbrella.

*Careers Exhibition. College Awareness Week*

*Apprenticeships Engineers Week*

The apprenticeship model offers a very real transitional opportunity for students in DEIS schools in particular.

*Delivery of information for third year students and their parents.*

*Psychometric Assessment for Incoming First Years*

*Regarding children with autism*

A formal Transition Planning process for students who are on the Autism Spectrum at Post-Primary level has worked successfully in some schools in third year of the Junior Certificate Programme (at age 14 approximately) or by latest in the year immediately thereafter, usually the Transition Year Programme, in line with International Best Practice and the recommendations of the Task Force on Autism.

*GOAL project*

The Guidance and Orientation for Adult Learners project (GOAL) was a collaboration between six partner countries: Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Slovenia. It sought to develop existing models of guidance and orientation in the participating countries so these services could reach low-educated adults and address their needs. It tested the hypothesis that a guidance service centred on the needs of low-educated adults may help to increase the participation of this cohort in education and training. Each of the six partner countries piloted new guidance models at two or more programme sites to specific target groups within the low-educated adult population. Though the specific focus of the GOAL intervention differed somewhat across countries, the pilot had four primary objectives:

* develop and/or enhance partnerships and networks with other organisations serving the target groups;
* engage in outreach activities designed to bring guidance services to those target groups;
* define the competences which counsellors require to enable them to address the specific needs of GOAL clients; and
* develop and effectively use guidance tools tailored to low-educated adults.

Through the combination of these four intervention strategies, countries pursued a fifth, overarching objective: to provide high-quality guidance services that optimised adults’ education and/or employment outcomes.

*Keeping up to date*

Keeping abreast of current, up to date sources of career information can be a challenge, and particularly difficult in Ireland, where one has to access different sources such as Career Portal; university/IOT websites; Smart Futures; An Bord Altranais; Gradireland.com etc. The UK has some really useful career resources, such as the National Career Service. There is broad agreement that the effective use of online career information resources such as Career Portal, Qualifax and the CAO website require a high level of support from guidance professionals. This appears to be the case at second level and further education as well as in the adult guidance service.  Such support includes group/class instruction in navigating and interpreting the information as well as one to one guidance and support in the use of online resources and working through the jargon.

Other quality sources of information include guest speakers coming to schools and colleges; local employers; employment agencies; supported employment organisations and recruitment services. Events such as career fairs can be very effective, particularly when guidance professionals in the schools and colleges liaise with employers and support services in their planning and delivery.   Psychometric instruments, such as Career Decisions and Career Directions can be useful particularly in FE and Adult Guidance. Ability testing can also be useful with these groups in terms of giving individuals the confidence in their literacy and numeracy ability as well as language proficiency. It is important to note that qualified professionals are required to administer such assessment instruments.

Links with the local employers are very important and the fostering of relationships with employers should be developed in all areas of education.  Involving employers in supporting education and training through initiatives such as sponsorship, scholarships or student awards can be mutually beneficial. Engagement with SOLAS and supporting initiatives such as regional skills awareness and FIT training are to be encouraged. Events such as an Enterprise Road Shows could engage learners from all sectors and foster the ethos of enterprise within education and training activities. In the case of the Adult Guidance Service, it “provides a service to the whole community, working closely with all the relevant statutory and local agencies i.e. Regional Skills Fora, Local Area Partnerships, Citizen Information Centres, Volunteer Centres, MABS, Local Development Programmes and Enterprise Boards)” and “established strong relationships with our colleagues in second level guidance, Youthreach, Further Education Colleges, third level education and the Probation Service” (AEGAI, 2018: 2).

The reduction in guidance provision in schools has resulted in many guidance counsellors having a dual role as teachers. This has often resulted in the guidance department being used for crisis intervention rather than in planned career activities. It is crucial that qualified guidance practitioners are employed to work with students in accessing career guidance tools, as the experience is that such tools are not fully or accurately utilised by students when unsupported. This is particularly true for adult returners to education and there is consensus that basic training is required in the use of online guidance resources for mature students. There appears to be a lack of consistency in the terminology used across various career guidance tools, which can prove confusing, particularly for mature students and adults returning to education and the recommendation is that plain English versions of such instruments be developed. Similar inconsistencies in terminology exists in how training centres, FE and HE institutions describe course information, entry requirement and progression routes.

There is consensus that the whole area of career guidance and information services is hugely under resourced.  Guidance services in schools have seen reductions in the number of hours being allocated directly in line with an increase in the demand on the service, particularly in relation to the mental health of students. Increased administrative workload, particularly in relation to HEAR and DARE applications, has further impacted on the work.    Allied to this is an increasing need for self-care for guidance professionals as well as the need for up-to-date CPD in areas such as modern apprenticeships; enterprise; the changing nature of employment practices and new and developing career areas. Where guidance counsellors in schools have a dual role as teachers, this frequently prevents them from attending essential CPD. In fact, the Adult Guidance Service currently has no access to CPD.

**Other Issues for Consideration**

* At post-primary, there is too much emphasis on CAO points and processes.
* It is important for guidance counsellors to have access to students undertaking the LCA programme.
* Guidance counsellors need to have time to meet students on a one-to-one basis for guidance support as well as counselling support (as required).
* Peer pressure to ‘go to college’.
* Many families cannot afford to allow their child to attend college.
* A central body (CAO) for applying for Apprenticeships and Traineeships.
* The profile of apprenticeships needs to be elevated
* Greater promotion of apprenticeships and traineeships programmes
* Develop greater links with schools/training centres and employers
* More time could be given to students, planning to attend 3rd level, to research and compare courses, careers and the possibilities open to them.
* More guidance/vocational planning time is needed for a student who does not have a family history of proactive career planning or progression to 3rd level or identifying the shortfall in their own skills and how to specifically target that.
* At FET level, drop-out occurs for a myriad of reasons;
* Didn’t know what the course was about
* Peers were going to UL/UCC/UCD etc.
* Don’t like the course
* The course is perceived as too hard - maths, computers and science in particular
* Students didn’t realise that there are other options
* Students out of their depth
* Accommodation costs
* Students become overwhelmed by relationships.
* Financial implications of losing SUSI grant

**Conclusion**

Existing out of school support systems such as guidance services have contributed significantly to Ireland having an extraordinarily low level of early school leaving. However, as the economy continues to grow (ESRI, 2017; IMF, 2017; EU Commission 2017) it is likely that increased employment opportunities for young people will create a ‘pull factor’ away from full-time education. Hence, it is essential that the DES invests vigorously in the services needed to prevent early school leaving, support those seeking to upskill, and support young people who have left the mainstream education system already. It is also vital that guidance services be able to students who are encountering personal difficulties. For those reasons it is essential that significant additional staffing be available to guidance services in schools, colleges of further education and the adult education sector.

Ends

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**Glossary**

AEGAI Adult Education Guidance Association of Ireland

ASTI Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland

C&C Community and Comprehensive

CAMHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CAO Central Applications Office

CPD Continuing Professional Development

CSO Central Statistics Office

DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

DES Department of Education and Skills

ESRI Economic and Social Research Institute

ETB Education and Training Board

EU European Union

FE Further Education

FET Further Education and Training

HE Higher Education

HEA Higher Education Authority

HSE Health Service Executive

ICT Information and Communications Technology

IGC Institute of Guidance Counsellors

IMF International Monetary Fund

LCA Leaving Certificate Applied

NAPD National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

NCGE National Centre for Guidance in Education

NEET Not in Education, Employment or Training

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SEN Special Educational Needs

SJI Social Justice Ireland

SPHE Social Personal and Health Education

TUI Teachers’ Union of Ireland

UCC University College Cork

UCD University College Dublin

UK United Kingdom

UL University of Limerick

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