



Submission by National Centre for Guidance in Education to the Department of Health on the proposed regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists

National Centre for Guidance in Education, 2016.

This submission is made on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education and Skills, with responsibility to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education and to inform the policy of the Department in the field of guidance.

Introduction

The Department of Health (DOH) proposed regulation of counsellors and psychotherapists under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005¹ has implications for the guidance profession (professionals who deliver guidance in educational settings are referred to as guidance counsellors) in Ireland, specifically because of the use of the title ‘*guidance counsellor*’ to describe those professionals.

In the international arena the title ‘*guidance counsellor*’ is widely understood and is employed by professionals delivering guidance services in a number of countries. In some countries, such as the US, school counsellor is employed. However, despite some variability in the use of the title *guidance counsellor* the term is widely understood and recognised.

The title *guidance counsellor* is an established descriptor of the role of these professionals in educational settings. It has been employed by the Department of Education (now Department of Education and Skills) since the 1990s (DE, 1995) and by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) from 1976².

¹ <http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/proposed-regulation-of-counsellors-and-psychotherapist-under-the-health-and-social-care-professionals-act-2005/>

² <http://www.igc.ie/About-Us/Our-History>

Rationale

The NCGE, on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills (DES), is making this submission to seek derogation for the title ‘*guidance counsellor*’ from requirements of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. As highlighted above the title *guidance counsellor* is employed by specialists providing guidance in educational settings³. The profession, established in the late 1960s, consists of highly qualified competent professionals with clear roles and responsibilities (DES, 2016; NGF, 2007).

Guidance in schools is defined by the Department of Education and Skills as:

“...a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance”. (Department of Education and Science; 2005, pg. 4).

The guidance role is a multifaceted one requiring specialist knowledge and competences to lead and manage service design and delivery. The *guidance counsellor* works with diverse needs and across service settings.

Counselling is offered within a guidance context – personal, educational and career counselling and is defined as:

“... 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, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these”. (Department of Education and Science, 2005; pg. 4).

Guidance in adult guidance context is defined as:

“Guidance facilitates people throughout their lives 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; pg. 6).

Counselling: QQI Award Standards and DES Criteria and Guidelines

The award standards for counselling and psychotherapy differ from those for Guidance Counselling in educational settings. The *QQI Award Standards – Counselling and Psychotherapy* (QQI, 2014) present award standards for counselling and psychotherapy. QQI highlights *“The standards are for ‘intended programme learning outcomes’ and are designed to help programme designers and developers ensure that programmes provide a suitable grounding in counselling.....for prospective practitioners”* (Ibid, pg. 2). QQI states very clearly that the Award Standards are not intended for guidance counselling qualifications, *“The awards standards here are not for qualifications for Guidance Counselling in the*

³ Guidance counsellors with a DES recognised qualification in guidance counselling work in DES recognised schools (teachers registered with the Teaching Council) and Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS). More information is available from the DES Programme Recognition Framework (2016).

education sector and not intended to be involved in the regulation of this activity” (Ibid, pg. 3).

The DES *Programme Recognition Framework: Guidance Counselling. Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers (PRF)* (2016) sets out criteria and guidelines for providers of guidance counselling initial education programmes⁴. Eight areas of competence are identified for programme providers to address, including ‘counselling skills in a guidance context’ (DES, 2016; pg. 13). Required competences for the ‘counselling skills in a guidance context’ area of competence are indicated in Table 1 of the document.

From an examination of the two publications above, it is evident that the intention and focus of the education and training programmes differ and the depth and breadth of the competences vary considerably. The QQI Award Standards apply to programmes which intend to “...*provide a suitable grounding in counselling... for prospective practitioners*” (QQI, 2014; pg. 2) i.e. prepare graduates to become professional counsellors who offer therapeutic services, while the competences set out in the DES PRF aim to equip graduates of guidance counselling programmes with counselling skills that are applied in a guidance context.

The NCGE, therefore, regards the counselling and guidance counselling professions as two separate professions with their own unique roles and sets of professional competences. The knowledge, skills and competences required by each of the professions varies considerably. Therefore, the NCGE position is that guidance counsellors (in educational settings) are not health and social care professionals nor should they be included in the regulation of counsellors under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005.

Request

The NCGE, on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills, seeks derogation for Guidance Counsellors, as described above from the requirements under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. The NCGE is happy to provide further information regarding this request, should it be required.

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⁴ Programme providers who intend for graduates to work in guidance services under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills.

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