



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

National Framework for Guidance

Consultation Paper

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Introduction

In January 2022, Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, established the National Policy Group on Lifelong Guidance to develop a coherent long term strategic framework. The National Policy Group comprises five government departments: The Department of Education (DoE), Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE).

The work of this group is focussing on ensuring a coherent national long-term policy on guidance through the development of an overarching National Strategic Framework for Guidance. In addition to highlighting both strengths and weaknesses in the current guidance system, the Indecon report (2019) brought to the fore particular questions on the effectiveness of guidance provision across all levels of education. The Indecon report set out that when we recognise guidance as being life long it often sits across a variety of sectors and in order to have a successful programme in place, the co-ordination of different agencies and developments in guidance is a critical issue in developing policy. The group has brought together the key agents in relation to guidance in order to provide a more co-ordinated, clear and cohesive service to all.

The group's starting point is that guidance must provide a combination of information, advice and counselling services that can enable learners and potential learners to make better choices about their learning pathways and career and life aspirations. We envisage that this can only be achieved through an aspiration for a comprehensive guidance and information system aimed at and supporting all learners throughout their lifetime. The role of guidance in compensating and addressing poor social capital in understanding a complex system is perhaps the most important public role for the service. We recognise that there should be a particular emphasis on the critical point at which young people begin to move from a generalised understanding of opportunities towards making life and career choices.

The overriding objective is to deliver a much more ambitious role for guidance and information. This is not just an objective of showing school students and adults the different places / locations - in the real world and online - where these services are provided or where these resources can be found, but:-

- significantly improving the quality of these services and resources with a particular focus on the needs of a wider range of individuals
- mapping these services and resources in a way that is openly accessible for all those who want to use them;

- focussing resources on teaching people how best to navigate and realise the full value of the services / resources; and
- creating and maintaining feedback loops where we continue to innovate, improve the quality, accessibility and comprehensibility of the resources and services by working with and drawing on the experience of those who avail of guidance services.

The purpose of this consultation paper is to assist the work of the group in developing the strategic framework, which will set the direction of actions to be carried out under the remit of particular Departments and agencies. The paper highlights the background to guidance in Ireland, gives a brief international perspective and sets out the proposed vision, principles and objectives to achieve lifelong guidance – guidance for all whenever they need it at various junctures in their lives. It is intended that this paper be read in advance of participating in the consultation process either via the online questionnaire or by written submission to guidance@education.gov.ie.

Background - Guidance in Ireland

In Ireland, guidance in education settings is provided nationally via state funding for post-primary education, higher education and further education and training. Guidance counselling and career services are also provided by other state funded bodies and a growing body of private practitioners.

Guidance counselling in Ireland is holistic in nature and has three strands: educational guidance, career guidance and personal guidance. 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.¹

The DoE promotes a whole school approach and provides a guidance allocation to post primary schools (for students aged 12 -18 years) based on student enrolment and type of school. Guidance is a whole school activity where each school forms a team, in which the guidance counsellor has a pivotal role, to collaboratively design and develop a whole-school Guidance plan as a means of supporting the needs of all students. Guidance counselling in post primary schools is holistic and may include personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling or combinations of these and 'is a key part of the school guidance programme, offered on an individual or

¹ National Guidance Forum Report 2007

group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis. Guidance 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.’. The Junior Cycle programme must include guidance education. Many schools choose to include guidance education as part of their provision for Wellbeing. Guidance is provided in senior cycle programmes.

The DFHERIS supports guidance through provision of funding in both the FET sector and the Higher Education sector as well as actions under the FET strategy. In Further Education and Training (FET) guidance support includes the Adult Educational Guidance Services, Post Leaving Cert / Colleges of Further Education, Youthreach/ Community Training Centres supported by DFHERIS. Since the establishment of SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), the ETB Adult Educational Guidance Services are managed by the 16 Regional ETBs as part of their ETB Integrated FET Provision and Support Services. Since 2020, DFHERIS is responsible for overarching policy in the FET sector, including guidance. There are also supports for trainees through the advocacy service and for apprentices through the training advisers located in training centres.

The Higher Education Authority disburses core funding to the higher education institutions, which includes provision for Student Support Services. Student Support Services encompass a range of supports for students to ensure that they get the help they need and may include Careers Offices, Mature Student and Access Offices, International Office, Disability supports, Health and Wellbeing, among other supports.

The DETE role in Guidance relates to the provision of up to date labour market information and skills trends and needs/opportunities which is a crucial feature of an effective guidance service. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, which comes under the remit of DETE, provides advice to the National Skills Council and to Government in this respect and fosters engagement and collaboration between relevant Government Departments and agencies, the education and training system, and enterprise.

The DCEDIY has an oversight role in relation to two whole-of-Government national disability strategies – the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2022) (NDIS) and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2015-2024) (CES) – both of which contain actions related to the provision of appropriate and accessible career guidance to people with disabilities.

Under the NDIS all Departments and Agencies have a role in the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities. Under Action 46, “People with disabilities are encouraged and motivated to develop to the maximum of their potential, with a view to participating in further education and employment”. In advancing this action, all relevant departments and agencies have a role providing proper guidance concerning further education, training and career

options. The CES (2015-2018) (Action 1.7) requires that all guidance counsellors in post primary and Further Education and Training settings, as part of their initial training and on-going CPD, would consider how they could effectively support students with disabilities and thereafter to implement such support. Going forward, the national disability policy landscape in all respects will continue to be informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Ireland ratified in 2018. In line with Ireland's approach to continuously advancing the implementation of rights under the UNCRPD, the provision of guidance counselling to people with disabilities is relevant for obligations relating to the rights to dignity, equality, education, employment and independent living, amongst others.

The **Department of Social Protection (DSP)** provide the Public Employment Services through Intreo. The *Pathways to Work 2021-2025^[1]* is the government's national employment services strategy, the government's overall framework for activation and employment support policy. Backed by a total of 83 commitments across Government, it sets out plans to deliver over 1.6 million engagements with jobseekers each year. It aims to ensure that as many job opportunities as possible are filled by people who are unemployed including long term unemployed, youth, vulnerable and marginalised people and aiming to improve labour market transitions and ensure better labour market outcomes for all.

DSP provides a free Public Employment Service to jobseekers, employers, employed people, and job changers. These services provide access to Employment Services, Intreo Partners, Work Experience Programmes and Employer Opportunities.

Rationale for the Development of Lifelong Guidance

Over recent years, lifelong guidance has become increasingly valued in European education and training, as well as within employment and social inclusion policies. The following outline why Lifelong Guidance is essential:

Changing patterns of work, in an ever more globalised economy and digitalised world, demand that people upskill, reskill and learn throughout life for different careers and jobs. People no longer take a job for life rather they expect to transition to a number of jobs over their careers.

^[1] Pathways to Work Strategy 2021 – 2025 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1feaf-pathways-to-work-2021/>

Provision of clear, coherent information and guidance, on education, training, employment and career opportunities, is essential therefore. Individuals need to be able to access opportunities for advancement in the way that suits them best, to reach their full potential, and engage in life-long and life-wide learning. This is crucial if Ireland is to have a robust and sustainable economy and society that encompasses everyone.

Effective guidance helps individuals reach their potential, economies become more efficient and societies become fairer (2021, *Investing in career guidance*, published by Cedefop, the OECD, the European Commission, the European Training Foundation, the International Labor Organisation and UNESCO).

The expected impact of lifelong guidance includes the development of career management skills, labour market integration, effective management of transitions, social inclusion, increasing individuals' employability and participation rates in education and training, reducing the number of NEETs (not in employment, education and training) and preventing early leavers of education and training.

The Indecon report (April 2019) commissioned by the then Department of Education and Skills, set out 18 recommendations, including the establishment of a National Policy Group to develop a coherent long term strategy for lifelong guidance.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH SUPPORTING LIFELONG GUIDANCE

Independent national and international research identifies the need for lifelong Guidance

Overall, findings from the Indecon Report suggest Ireland has a number of features of effective careers support systems. However, there are areas which require urgent attention. These include the need to improve career information and advice, including on labour market opportunities and on apprenticeship options. There is also a need for a major initiative to enhance employer engagement and to extend supports for special education schools. Changes to organisational structures are also required. In addition, there is a need to intensify the potential role of guidance in reducing economic and social disadvantage.

The OECD Skills Strategy Project, which Ireland is undertaking through 2022, focuses on an examination of National Skills Strategy and skills approaches - in order to ensure that we have a solid foundation on which to build Ireland's competitiveness and support economic and social sustainability into the future. Initial findings from the ongoing work in Ireland show that a culture of lifelong learning needs to be further strengthened. It also suggests that there are gaps in the Irish skills ecosystem and that accessible careers information and guidance could be better supported through the following:

- Need to embed a culture of lifelong learning in Ireland
- Need to better balance demand and supply of skills

- Need for better signposting of career information and pathways

The OECD Skills Strategy Project's recommendations and findings are expected to be published in March 2023 and will further inform policy direction on increasing adult participation in lifelong learning. The provision of good quality careers and skills information and guidance is central to this policy direction.

It is recognised that in order to close the gaps identified by the Indecon report and realise the potential opportunities identified by the OECD's Skills Strategy Project, there is a need for an integrated whole of government approach to lifelong learning and guidance.

International experience of guidance policy

Several EU Council Resolutions, Recommendations and Conclusions include reference to guidance within the wider context of specific education, training and labour market policies.

From 2008 – 2015 the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network ²(ELGPN) was funded by the European Commission to bring together EU member States to identify, develop and support the development of guidance policies. Ireland was a full member of the ELGPN from 2011-2015 and actively engaged in the development of overall guidelines, quality assurance and career management skills guidelines.

More recently lifelong guidance has been prioritised by a number of countries while recognising and considering the following:

- Lack of equal opportunities for career development
- Complex nature of guidance
- Fragmented development of digital guidance services
- Global phenomena imply rethinking of guidance skills

The common trend towards the individualisation of learning (European Commission, 2020a) and employment gives guidance an important role in supporting individuals in their effective navigation of the increasing number of transitions between education, employment and unemployment.

² ELGPN The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, ELGPN <http://www.elgpn.eu/>

On 1 July 2020, the European Commission published the Communication on the European Skills Agenda³ (European Commission, 2020a) with 12 actions for the next 5 years to 'help individuals and business develop more and better skills'

In 2020 the EU Commission also published a report on *Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities*.⁴

Across Europe and further afield many countries have guidance policies and strategies in place such as Sweden, Finland, Northern Ireland and Canada. Guidance is a key policy lever to address challenges and facilitate a post-pandemic employment recovery for all countries. This guidance support can help individuals at all life stages to make informed choices about work and learning so they gain new skills that enable them to transition to in-demand jobs and reduce economic disparity.

National Framework for Lifelong Guidance

Below the proposed vision, high level objectives and principles to achieve Lifelong Guidance has been set out, along with the proposed pillars and outcomes to be achieved.

The intention is that the Strategic Framework will be an overarching document with high level actions to be delivered to achieve these objectives and outcomes. The individual Departments will have responsibility for particular actions that will emerge under the strategic framework and will decide how best to achieve same.

The public consultation process is designed to seek your views on

- the proposed vision, objectives, principles and outcomes
- to identify any gaps in what has been proposed
- to seek your views on actions that need to be taken to deliver same.

³European Skills Agenda <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223>

⁴ Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4dfac3fa-7a0b-11ea-b75f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Draft Vision for Lifelong Guidance

A clear and meaningful vision is essential to build and maintain momentum and set the course for action for what needs to constitute a significant reform. We are moving towards a more unified guidance system to ensure access to high quality and appropriate lifelong guidance for all. This consultation will inform the group's thinking as to what the new system should look like.

'A more unified guidance system which will allow all young people and adults to have access to high quality and appropriate lifelong guidance'

- Lifelong guidance aims to provide career development support for individuals of all ages, at all career stages.
- It includes careers information, advice, guidance counselling, assessment of skills and mentoring.
- Quality guidance services should be available to all individuals, regardless of their employment situation, socioeconomic status, ethnicity or gender.

Specifically, the framework should address the following draft **five strategic objectives** underpinned by a guiding principle that guidance is lifelong and life wide.

1. Making lifelong guidance a reality;
2. Improving the quality of evidence-based lifelong guidance policy, guidance services, information and digital tools
3. Professionalisation of guidance acknowledging the diversity of guidance roles and professional training required for each role;
4. Promoting inclusion, lifelong career mobility, equity of access and active citizenship through sustainable education, lifelong career management skills, diverse training and employment pathways;
5. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of lifelong guidance education and training

Principles Guiding the Vision for a High Functioning Guidance System

<p>Accessible and person-oriented</p>	<p>That everyone has access to lifelong guidance to make well-informed and conscious personal life decisions about education and careers in an ever changing world.</p> <p>All individuals, regardless of age or circumstance, will be entitled to access free, impartial guidance counselling and careers information.</p> <p>Career management skills will be a consistent focus of provision.</p>
<p>High quality</p>	<p>Those engaged in guidance work have the capabilities and competence to perform high-quality, multi-channelled guidance work.</p> <p>CPD will be consistently available to practitioners.</p>

<p>Equal, Inclusive and sustainable</p>	<p>That guidance promotes an equal, fair and diverse society.</p> <p>Those with the greatest need can expect more intensive and tailored support.</p> <p>All who access guidance services will be treated with dignity and respect.</p> <p>Well-functioning and accessible hybrid/digital services in which guidance and career development are at the centre, serving lifelong learners smoothly, including provision of digital services (with the use of artificial intelligence) and in person support.</p> <p>Career information, advice and guidance will be recognisable and coherent.</p>
<p>Cross-sectional and coordinated</p>	<p>That the sectors responsible for guidance co-operate smoothly with clear division of responsibilities.</p> <p>Measures to provide guidance in different sectors will be jointly planned and implemented through inter-governmental cooperation.</p> <p>Formal networks and partnerships of guidance providers and practitioners are established at local level</p>
<p>Evidence-informed</p>	<p>An evidence-based lifelong guidance system and policy development.</p> <p>Guidance services will utilise available data around the labour market and skills gaps.</p> <p>Effective use of skills data within and across government (skills data exchanges within the government; coordination of skills needs data collection and dissemination processes).</p> <p>Monitoring and impact assessment of guidance services.</p>

Four Key Strategic Pillars

The following **four key priority areas** or **strategic pillars** have been identified below with their key outcomes. Each of these pillars will be informed by evidence-based research.

Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3	Pillar 4
Lifelong guidance services and Information provision	Professionalisation of lifelong guidance	Access and inclusion	Lifelong guidance, career management skills and career mobility
<i>Outcome: everyone has access to comprehensive and high quality user-friendly and accessible careers and skills information and to appropriate guidance and support in navigating that information</i>	<i>Outcome: all those providing guidance (guidance counselling/career guidance) have relevant training appropriate to the role and the education/work/training work setting.</i>	<i>Outcome: lifelong guidance counselling/ career guidance services available to all (those with a disability/ newcomers/ students/ unemployed/ retirees/ migrants/career changers etc.)</i>	<i>Outcome: everyone has the career management skills required to facilitate lifelong access to training, education, upskilling and reskilling opportunities; mobility opportunities; self-employment; and the labour market</i>

Questions to reflect on:

- In what is going to be an increasingly digital society, how do we achieve a better balance between technology and direct guidance support?
- How do we ensure that education and career information is extracted in a dynamic way and made transparent via a more coherent set of comprehensive sources to all stakeholders?
- How can advice and guidance counselling services add more value and provide more targeted interventions?
- How can we empower learners throughout their lives to manage their lifelong education and career paths?

- What are the interventions at the various stages in life that can enable people to make better and well-informed choices for the remainder of their lives?
- What is the first point at which young people begin to seriously consider career choices?
- Is there a role for the guidance services working in close cooperation with a range of stakeholders to take a more proactive approach to provide young people and adults with information about skills trends / demands / labour market opportunities?
- Has the strong social and cultural bias towards higher education resulted in reluctance in learners to pursue apprenticeships and further education? Is this leading to poor career decisions? If so, what has to happen? Does guidance have a role?
- Is there a need for different career information or is there a need to make career information more accessible and easier to find?
- Does the role and qualification requirements of guidance counsellors in schools, FET and Higher Education need to be reviewed?
- Should there be a competent authority to recognise guidance counsellors?
- Does the current Professional Learning and Development opportunities equip guidance professionals to keep abreast of all latest information and developments?
- Is the current guidance system inclusive and lifelong? Are there gaps in provision for services for people outside of education?
- Does the current career management skills training address needs?
- Are there any improvements that could be made in terms of exposing young people and adults to work and career opportunities before they make their career choices?
- Are there specific areas where you believe further guidance related research would be beneficial?

POTENTIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS

- Improve the use of digital technologies in the provision of lifelong guidance. Explore the options for provision of a centralised multi-channel, blended career guidance support.
- Seek to improve accessible labour market intelligence and build the competencies of both guidance professionals and learners in order to make successful use of online technologies
- Seek to make guidance support inclusive and career information accessible and available to all
- Ensure organisational structures across the system support the provision of high-quality, lifelong and life-wide career information advice and guidance
- Review the in-service and professional training for guidance counsellors across the system
- Review current DE education and qualification requirements to work as a guidance counsellor in a school. Publish revised requirements.
- Review guidance allocations to schools (levels and types of school)
- Identify current unmet needs in terms of qualified supply of guidance counsellors in schools and the factors underpinning lack of supply.

- Promote the development of lifelong career management skills training in education settings.
- Explore with DFHERIS and QQI possibilities for a competent authority or route for those presenting non-standard guidance training and qualifications to be recognised to work in Ireland for various guidance roles.
- Encourage employers to develop further opportunities for learners to engage in work shadowing and work experience opportunities and the provision of labour market information in a user friendly format
- Actively support transition planning at key life stages
- Engage with stakeholders to consult and to collaborate with on the development of the lifelong guidance strategic framework

Your contribution

You are now invited to complete a written submission to guidance@education.gov.ie and/or to complete an online survey [here](#).

The closing date for submissions and the survey is 15 February 2023.

Thank you for your contribution.