

## **National Guidance Forum – report from Marian Lyon 16.10.06**

The Minister for Education and Science and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment in April 2004 jointly established the NGF to enable guidance to become a reality through a seamless continuum of service provision by the service providers. The submission of the final report to the two ministers will take place in January 2007.

The objectives of the Forum were to

- Ensure that guidance becomes central to the public policy and planning process in education, the labour market and social strategies
- Develop, communicate and implement meaningful models of guidance that underpin a vision of personal fulfilment, a fair society and sustainable employability.
- Harness the proactively manage the wealth of existing guidance resources and agree mechanisms for measuring relevant and realistic outcomes.
- Move from a fragmented provision of guidance to a cohesive multi-faceted professional, accessible service, responsive to the needs of the individual and society.

The Forums' definition of guidance is

**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.**

The forum has 34 members and an independent Chair, and is managed by a Steering Group and has undertaken the following:

- Collaborated with Forfas on the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs to draw up the terms of reference for a national audit of careers information and dissemination: the Forums recommendations have incorporated the outcomes of this study.

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- Prepared a proposal for the establishment of a National Learning Line<sup>1</sup> to DETE/DES in accordance with the recommendation of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning
- Liaised with the International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy on developments in guidance At EU level and their implications for guidance in Ireland.
- Made a submission about funding for guidance under the National Development Plan 2006 –2011
- Participated in the EU Joint Actions funded project Developing National Guidance for a in Six Member States (MEDSUI) 2004-2006

A Steering Group manages the NGF, there were four subcommittees and they undertook the following four tasks:

**To carry out a Consultative Process to access the views and recommendations of the general public:** The outcomes of the research have informed the Forums' recommendations for strengthening provision to achieve a seamless guidance service across the lifespan.

**To identify the Competences required in a guidance practitioner:**

the sub-cttee developed a framework of competencies for guidance practitioners, which will influence professional education and training of practitioner who will provide guidance across the life cycle and in a range of difference contexts.

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**<sup>1</sup> Development of a National Learning Line that will serve careers information need across the lifespan, including those of third age workers. This resource would include a web-based portal that is needs based, containing information on labour market opportunity & trends, as well as education opportunities, costs and funding sources. The portal would be complemented by a national phone helpline staffed by personnel appropriately trained in guidance. This service would underpin all guidance provision in all sectors and assist in the provision of a seamless guidance service to all individuals in society.**

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**To set out the steps needed to ensure Quality Assurance in guidance:** produced a quality assurance framework for guidance that will enable policy makers and providers to ensure that they provide high-quality services to clients throughout the life cycle. It also proposes structures for evaluating services and quality improvement measures.

**To produce a Scoping Paper,** containing the historical context of guidance in Ireland as well as the views of the stakeholders: the background paper on Guidance in Ireland outlines current provision and identifies gaps. The paper has informed the recommendations of the Forum on policy development and coordination of guidance.

### **The Consultative Process**

The consultative process was carried in two phases, in phase one 635 members of the general public completed questionnaires designed to ask people about their experience of guidance, opinions of guidance services in Ireland and what they would recommend to improve services. Phase two involved focus groups with seven targeted groups, i.e. people who are not Irish nationals, early school leavers, people who unemployed or who are receiving a low income, people with physical and/or learning disabilities, parents of preschool and primary school children, adults with literacy difficulties and people who were 60 years and over.

As the report of a review of guidance in second level was with the Minister of Education and Science at that time, before being released for general review, the decision was taken not to include second level schools or parents of second level students in this Consultative Process<sup>2</sup>, but to consider its findings in the Literature Review and overall analysis.

The key findings, which emerged from the Consultative Process, are that people do 'need guidance to get guidance'. As well as developing and strengthening resources in guidance, people in the general public need to be informed, supported and guided to

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<sup>2</sup> **Forfas (May 2006) Careers and Labour Market Information in Ireland, 5 second-levels schools, Youthreach and 3 PLC Colleges were consulted as part of this research.**

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use these services. Suggestions from participants include:

- Provide formal guidance services throughout the life span so that it is available for children in pre-school and for people who have retired
- Widen guidance provision so that it is available for everyone, regardless of age, employment situation or income
- Ensure that people working in guidance are well trained, supported with proper quality assurance procedures in place
- Ensure that guidance services are in appropriate and convenient locations and that they are well resourced
- Recognise and support the role of parents, teachers, employers and other in guidance
- Guide people to avail of guidance by:
  - Informing them of the services through advertising widely
  - Helping them access it by providing sufficient supports
  - Providing follow-up services if required
  - Strengthening links with referral agencies.

These recommendations are not new. They are contained in many reports and policy documents. Yet they are made by people who are unemployed who have 'slipped through the net', people who have literacy difficulties and who were 'let down' by the formal education system, young people who have left the formal school system, people who are not Irish nationals and who are struggling to understand and be understood, people who have physical and or/or learning disabilities who have to 'fight' to get what they want, parents of children who are determined to ensure that their children get what they need; people who have retired and who feel 'invisible' and who have to argue that they have a right to education too. These recommendations are also made by other people who were involved in this process – people who are well educated and are proud of the guidance they received and keen to see it available to all, people who are in employment, earning a good wage, but would like to consider a career change and do not know how to, people who are guidance counsellors who recognise what supports and resources are needed to help them do their

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jobs well, people who are teachers who see themselves as having a role in guidance, people who are employers who see the benefits of guidance to individuals and to the economy, people who are very negative about guidance services as well as people who are very positive about guidance services in Ireland.

These recommendations have been made by people who recognise the benefits of guidance and who want guidance services to be developed and resourced. These people are an enormous resource and many of them already involved locally and nationally in providing 'informal guidance' through their participation in national committees, with voluntary help lines or with such programmes for children in schools etc.

### **Summary of results of Phase One of the Consultative Process:**

- 78% of the sample described themselves as very satisfied or satisfied with their current situation.
- The majority of people (94%) indicated that they knew either a little, or nothing about guidance services in Ireland.
- 35% of respondents were 'positive' or 'very positive' about guidance services, with 16.5% 'negative' or 'very negative'.
- 65% of the sample said that guidance was available while they were in school and 84% of those availed of it.
- The guidance they received was predominantly associated with decisions regarding college and careers.
- 56% of the total sample answered the question 'How helpful was guidance in school' and of these 43% indicated that it had been 'very helpful' or helpful' while 26% described it as 'very unhelpful' or unhelpful.
- Many people gave detailed comments on their experience of guidance in school which focused on a range of issues such as their experience of individual guidance counsellor, the type of guidance they had received and when they had done so, their views on life-long guidance and private practitioners

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as well as resources and development and the role of parents in guidance.

- 21% of people reported having received guidance since they left school and the vast majority 78% said they had not.
- For those who received guidance since school, the guidance they received focused mainly on work and career issues while 10% of respondents described having received counselling.
- 80.5% of 123 people who answered the question 'How helpful was guidance since school' said that it was 'very helpful' or 'helpful' with only 6% describing it as 'unhelpful' and no- one indicating it was 'very unhelpful'.
- People's comments regarding their experience of guidance since school focused on the differences in guidance since school, the need of additional resources and the importance of making guidance accessible.
- 73% of respondents rated Information as the most important aspect of guidance.
- Many people were critical of Assessment as an aspect of guidance.
- Counselling, development programmes, Referral and Advice also rated highly as important aspects of guidance.
- 58% of respondents said that guidance would be 'very helpful' or 'helpful' to them now, compared with only 9% who maintained that it would be 'very unhelpful' or 'unhelpful'.
- Reasons given for indicating that guidance would be helpful now included: being at a crossroads in their lives, having difficulty in making decisions, experiencing stress, as well as some more general points.
- 69% of respondents said that they did not know where to access guidance services.

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- 145 people (23% of the total sample) listed where guidance could be accessed – 43% said ‘school/college’, 11% suggested an adult education centre, 8% said FAS, 10% the Internet and 10% family members, church members, friends and colleagues
  
- Respondents were asked what they would recommend to improve services and their suggestions included the following: advertise services better, network and link services more effectively; strengthen training and quality control; develop services at second level, for those who do not currently have access to guidance and for people who are not Irish nationals, as well as some more general comments.

### **Summary of themes, which emerged during Focus Groups:**

- ◆ There is a need for guidance to be provided from preschool right up to the elderly.
  
- ◆ Guidance services at preschool and primary school need to be developed and those at second level need to be strengthened and expanded.
  
- ◆ Guidance services in second level schools need to be available and to be seen to be available for students in the Junior Cycle and those who are less academic, as well as those who intend to go to university.
  
- ◆ Guidance services for adults need to be developed, expanded, better resourced and advertised.
  
- ◆ Teachers, employers and parents have an important role in guidance provision.
  
- ◆ Guidance services must be confidential and available for everyone who wants to avail of it, irrespective of age and financial situation.
  
- ◆ People need information and yet acknowledge that information on its own is not sufficient.

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- ◆ Counselling and development programmes are important aspects of guidance for adults, as many people need to build up confidence before they can make the most of training and career opportunities.
- ◆ There are financial implications for people engaging in training and employment schemes and people are anxious that their allowances can be cut as a result.
- ◆ There is a need for guidance services to follow-up on initial interviews.
- ◆ Guidance is important for groups such as parents, people with disabilities, people who are non-nationals, people who are due to retire or who have retired, children and adults who have literacy difficulties and people who are unemployed or on low income.
- ◆ Many people who would benefit from guidance services do not know how to access them and 'need guidance to get guidance'.
- ◆ People have a personal responsibility too in availing of opportunities, which are available to them.

### **Review of Guidance in Post-Primary Schools: DES: (2006)<sup>3</sup>**

The four strands of research were:

1. A quantitative and qualitative survey of the use of the ex-quota resources provided by the DES for guidance, carried out by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) in all second level schools (738)
2. A questionnaire survey in 206 of the 738 schools, carried out by Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI)

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<sup>3</sup> **Full report available from DES**

**[http://www.education.ie/serviet/ciobservlet/review\\_guidance\\_second\\_level\\_schools.doc?language=EN](http://www.education.ie/serviet/ciobservlet/review_guidance_second_level_schools.doc?language=EN) and from the office of NPC-pp in hard copy/**

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3. In-depth case studies involving principals, deputy principals, guidance counsellors and students in 15 schools selected from those surveyed in Strand 2, conducted by ERSI
4. Focus group interviews with a range of stakeholders including parents and students, conducted by a researcher from the Education Dept. Trinity College and coordinated by the NCGE.

The review identified some of the main issues and challenges facing school-based guidance provision, which are relevant to the proposals being put forward by the Forum.

### **Resources for guidance**

The model of guidance in operation in post-primary schools puts a strong emphasis on one-to-one guidance, mainly in the senior cycle. This model is resource intensive, and the review states that schools are stretched to the limits of their resources to meet the demand for guidance. There is insufficient support available when students need personal counselling over a long period, resulting in an imbalance between the various roles of the guidance counsellor in providing individual personal, careers and educational guidance, career information, educational development programmes and consultation with parents. Students commented that there was limited access to Information and Communications technology for guidance purposes. There is also an imbalance between guidance provision at junior and senior cycle in most schools. However, the review found that schools participating in the Guidance Enhancement Initiative were enabled to provide both group and individual guidance at junior cycle, which encouraged students to progress to senior cycle and on to higher education.

### **Profile and role of the guidance counsellors**

The personal qualities of guidance counsellors are considered one of the main strengths of the guidance service in post-primary schools. They are characterised as approachable, flexible, committed and hard working. Two-thirds of them are female, and one-third of those currently practising have been qualified for twenty years or more. Almost one in five (18%) have no guidance qualifications. Guidance counsellors reported difficulty in “juggling” their various teaching, information provision, guidance and

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counselling roles. There is also a level of confusion about guidance counsellors' remit and training among students and parents.

### **Professional development for guidance counsellors**

The review identified a need for systematic continuing professional development for guidance counsellors throughout their careers. The Forum recognises that this is especially necessary in the context of changes that affect the guidance counsellor's working environment, including for example

- Student entitlement to appropriate guidance
- National policies on lifelong learning and social/educational inclusion
- Requirement for guidance programme planning
- Improved access to education for students with special needs
- Development in psychometric testing
- Introduction of national qualifications framework
- Greater availability of information and communications technology, including web-based guidance resources.

### **Further reading:**

OCED Review of Career Guidance Policies:Ireland: County Note

Document is included on the OECD Internet Home Page.