

HECA Response to the Terms of Reference for the Career Guidance Review

To

Indecon International Consultants for the
The Department of Education and Skills, Ireland

By

HECA, Higher Education Colleges Association



May 2018

Contents

HECA Response to the Terms of Reference for the Career Guidance Review	1
Describe and review existing career guidance tools and career information for post-primary/further education/higher education students and adults, currently in place across the education and training system in Ireland.	1
Technology deficit in some schools	1
Technology deficit for the guidance counsellor	1
Assessment Instruments	1
Allocation of career guidance hours	2
Assess how learners form their opinions around career choice including when, who and what influences these choices.	3
STEM subjects and careers	3
New Education Routes (e.g. Apprenticeships)	3
Earlier stage Guidance Counselling	3
Review the quality, quantity and sources of career information available and assess which mechanisms and what formats have the greatest impact on students and adults career choices.	4
Outline what measures could be designed and what framework created to enhance enterprise engagement with the education and training system in relation to providing information on career pathways for students and adults.	5
Recommend changes to improve the existing career guidance tools and career information for post-primary/further education/higher education students and adults, currently in place across the education and training system in Ireland.	6
Other Points	6

HECA welcomed this opportunity to respond to the Terms of Reference for the Career Guidance Review carried out by Indecon International Consultants for the Department of Education and Skills, Ireland.

The terms of reference as presented are generally as would be expected though an evaluation of the terms of reference would be useful. Discussion with HECA members found that it would also be useful to define career guidance in the context of the review. Career Guidance is a very broad area and can be interpreted in many ways; are we referring to 'formal' career guidance through a dedicated Career Guidance Office or similar or is there scope to look at other mechanisms such as teachers/lecturers etc.? Furthermore, there is also confusion over the actual definition of 'guidance' as opposed to 'career guidance'.

Describe and review existing career guidance tools and career information for post-primary/further education/higher education students and adults, currently in place across the education and training system in Ireland.

The review will specifically consider;

- Existing policy framework for such tools and information.
- Information sources, including online tools.
- Organisational structures.

Technology deficit in some schools

Our experience is that in some post-primary schools there is a lack of available technology for students to access the online information tools for third-level and career information. Most schools will guide students to go online to access the CAO system. However, before a student makes their course choices on the CAO website there are numerous information sources online in areas such as career options, college websites, job profiles etc. which are not used as often as they could be, due to a lack of guidance time and guidance time with ICT resources.

Technology deficit for the guidance counsellor

Contacting post-primary schools' guidance counsellors can also be a challenge with not all schools having their own email service or access to computers as part of their day-to-day activity. If guidance counsellors are to communicate more effectively with third-level providers, employers and other groups which may help them; then their communications capabilities should be enhanced.

Assessment Instruments

In many cases there are assessment instruments or ability and aptitude tests available to second level schools. For example, Qualifax Interest Assessment (www.qualifax.ie) or Career Fit Series (<http://www.etconsult.com/>). Many of these tools apply psychometric or other testing to match the skills of the student with job types. However, these instruments require a level of training and expertise to be an effective part of guidance counselling. This can be an issue for schools that do not have a specifically specialist qualified guidance

counsellor. Adequate training needs to be provided to guidance counsellors to use these assessment tools.

Allocation of career guidance hours

In our experience many post-primary schools are unable to have dedicated classes allocated for guidance counselling. Prior to Budget 2012, each school/CFE received an 'ex-quota' allocation of hours for the delivery of guidance counselling from the Department of Education and Skills, calculated based on 22 hours of guidance counselling for every 500 pupils (IGC, 2017). Two thirds of the guidance counsellor posts were scheduled to be reinstated in September 2017 and growth is required in both the number of hours in career guidance as well as the number of guidance counsellors per school.

Personal career guidance services in schools have commonly focused on educational decision making, often with little attention to the occupational and longer-term career choices that flow from specific educational pathways. For instance, where career guidance services are wholly school-based, links with the labour market can be weak. And those who are planning to enter tertiary education may receive greater attention than the job-bound.

Moreover, in many schools the guidance counsellor may not be a dedicated resource. This impacts the service provided to the pupils. It also impacts the level of guidance expertise that the teacher charged with the responsibility may have. This can mean information on careers and post-second level options are not being given sufficient weight in the second-level student's school week. This is apparent to HECA colleges when visiting schools where a staff member is teaching core subjects along with providing guidance to final year students.

Such problems are made worse if, guidance counsellors must deal with personal and social guidance as well as educational and vocational guidance. In our experience, career guidance counsellors are often one of the first teachers that may be confided in when students are having other difficulties. Guidance counsellors are often having to provide a more holistic counselling service, adapting to issues such as mental health, anxiety and cyberbullying. This can increase the workload and make it difficult to prioritise guidance on third-level and career choices to senior cycle students. The two areas of work require rather different skills and resources. Career guidance, for example, requires regular updating to keep in touch with changes in the education system and the labour market. This may not be given sufficient attention within an integrated model. The universal experience appears to be that attention to the educational and vocational guidance needs of all students tends to get squeezed by attention to the personal and social guidance needs of those few students with certain difficulties. Again, resources impact the ability to provide a holistic counselling service.

Furthermore, DEIS schools have additional challenges of not just providing information regarding third-level choices but also the need for additional one-to-one information regarding support and funding schemes such as, HEAR and DARE. These challenges are

compounded for the most disadvantaged students, who are in high proportion subjected to the least engaging instruction.

Career guidance programmes have a disproportionate focus on the CAO process with Senior Certificate students. Earlier development of student's self-management skills which lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives should be encouraged before the Senior Certificate cycle begins. This will enable more informative choices about careers including decisions on CAO courses as well as allowing time for students who are not interested in the CAO pathway.

Assess how learners form their opinions around career choice including when, who and what influences these choices.

STEM subjects and careers

In line with the planned introduction and prominence of new STEM subjects for second-level education, there needs to be an emphasis on this in terms of guidance. Careers and roles in these sectors are rapidly evolving. Guidance counsellors need to be trained and informed as to the range of careers in the technology sector and there needs to be a range of initiatives to inform guidance counsellors as to the range of options and skills needs in these areas.

There has been a reported 16% decline in applications for information and communications technology courses, despite graduates in this field being in huge demand and generally among the highest paid (The Irish Times). As part of this education of guidance counsellors there needs to be processes for greater engagement with technology and ICT employers to inform students of the types of roles and opportunities in these areas.

In our experience this is particularly relevant for female students as we still find a reluctance in these students to engage with our computing courses. Specific initiatives should be developed to encourage more women in STEM.

New Education Routes (e.g. Apprenticeships)

There is an emerging trend for several new pathways to careers. For example, through routes like apprenticeships in various sectors. Many of these apprenticeships are in new areas such as technology, financial services and pharmaceuticals. Parents, guidance counsellors and by extension pupils may have existing preconceptions about what an apprenticeship is and that it is only for certain career types or trades. If these are to be overcome and these new routes promoted there needs to be an ongoing training and education role for the guidance counsellor and indeed parents and pupils.

Earlier stage Guidance Counselling

It is our experience, most of guidance counselling happens in 5th and 6th year. This occurs after students have selected their subject for the senior cycle. It would be advantageous if earlier counselling could be given tailored to younger students to give them broad exposure to the different types of careers available and what Leaving Certificate subjects they may need to keep as entry requirements to certain course areas at third-level. It would also give them broad exposure to the different types of careers available in the early years of

second-level. Transition year activities can be a large part of this and we feel there may be opportunities for more targeted career guidance work during this year.

Review the quality, quantity and sources of career information available and assess which mechanisms and what formats have the greatest impact on students and adults career choices.

Numerous students experience little connection between school and their interests and future aspirations, resulting in academic disengagement, poor course planning, lack of career awareness and vision, and poor preparedness for available careers. Drop-out rates are high, there are substantial needs for academic remediation in or prior to college. Career guidance needs to provide skill-based lessons to demonstrate first-hand how their classroom work is relevant to their future employment. Students could be offered opportunities to explore potential careers in a variety of fields and see how their school-based learning will help prepare them for these professions. This approach coincides with the *Action Plan for Education 2016-19* report from the Department of Education and Skills which highlights the need for Irish schools to increase the availability of quality entrepreneurship programmes and modules in second level education.

Some HECA colleges, have a programme of school visits where they visit post-primary schools to speak to them directly about careers and our courses. This is an effective method as it provides great engagement with the student. Where possible if students can be given the opportunity to meet current third-level students or people in roles they might aspire to, this should be encouraged. This may be particularly important for schools in areas of social disadvantage who may not have relevant community role models in the aspired careers.

Presently, there are a variety of information sources available to students on potential career and course choices. Online resources, fairs such as Higher Options, open days and events with employers are all important parts of the information mix. These sources are usually availed of in the final year of second level education and could be broadened to earlier years, even before the senior cycle begins. It would also be useful to explore and measure how often student access these career resources. Availability of information does not automatically encourage learners to access it and use it efficiently. There is real concern that the delivery of career guidance is not engaging sections of the student population or different learning styles. An evaluation of formal classes in personal development/evaluating career pathways may demonstrate a protective and positive impact on career guidance.

In Europe specifically, career guidance is considered a protective factor when it comes to Early School Leaving (ESL). ESL has significant costs to the individual, society and the economy, with figures suggesting that an Early School Leaver can cost the economy up to 1 million euro over their lifetime. Thus, there is significant interest in exploring ESL protective factors, as well as predictive ESL risk factors, across the globe. From a European perspective, interest is profoundly cost driven with a focus on reducing the burden on the economy over

the Early School Leaver's lifetime (though research also suggests the longer an individual remains in education, the more happy, healthy and civic-minded they are; voting more etc.).

Thus, an exploration of career guidance as a protective factor in terms of ESL is important. In keeping with this, the timing of such guidance is important as research indicates that risks of ESL are heightened at periods of transition i.e. primary to post primary; junior cycle to senior cycle. Guidance at such points is therefore critical. There is a more efficient mechanism and format needs to be done on the relationship between transition and guidance.

As students with a disability consist of a higher percentage of ESL, as well as having poorer post-school outcome and progression to HE, it's important that career guidance fosters a strong a role in positively connecting the student's abilities to potential careers, work experience and educational pathways. The motivational and, the timing aspects of such guidance is especially important and early career guidance support is important.

Outline what measures could be designed and what framework created to enhance enterprise engagement with the education and training system in relation to providing information on career pathways for students and adults.

Career guidance teachers could connect students (especially transition year students) with business and employers to create strong professional networks for every student and demonstrate a greater connection between in- and out-of-school experiences. Presently, transition year students are not always directed to roles, experts, companies or jobs that are aligned with their aspirations, subjects or interests. Career guidance teachers could be more engaged in networking and building these connections in the wider community. The challenge is the establishment and application of mechanisms to facilitate this.

Career guidance could link with experts and facilitate virtual mentoring or informal interviews, where students connect virtually with experts about school and work-based questions. Career guidance could also facilitate internships or job shadows where students learn about a job and/or field they are interested.

Generally, there needs to be a system established that would allow companies and colleges etc., to engage with students and provide information on career pathways and job roles at the different stages of the education and training system (not only transition year). In our experience many companies and industry bodies are happy to do this, but they are uncertain how to engage.

Items such as:

- How organisations can be involved in transition year programmes.
- How to provide job profiles to outline different types of careers to students.

- There needs to be a range of measures to keep guidance counsellors up to date on new job roles and industry/sector developments. The aim of this is to allow them to keep up to date with current job trends within organisations.
- Companies, colleges or enterprises have events that might appeal to students or have staff willing to speak to students. It would be beneficial if there was clarity or protocols on how they can organise this.

Recommend changes to improve the existing career guidance tools and career information for post-primary/further education/higher education students and adults, currently in place across the education and training system in Ireland.

- A professional development programme for guidance counsellors.
- UpToDate, industry linked, CPD commitment by career guidance counsellors.
- Career counsellors must continually enhance their knowledge and skills to assist students contemplating careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).
- Resourcing to allow dedicated guidance counselling classes in schools.
- Resourcing to allow use of technology in post-primary schools for guidance counselling. For many schools the provision of technology will allow them to use online resources for information and assessment than currently possible.
- More use of the time during transition year to carry out career guidance work for students and to work with third-level sector and industry.
- Earlier intervention of career guidance.
- Build strong links with employers and other providers that enable quality work experience and sustainable progression opportunities for all students.
- Clear and efficient networking with enterprise, industry, experts, role models, FE and HE bodies to provide real-life connections with career pathways.
- A central range of comprehensive career guidance information and advice options available on web and social media.
- Career guidance engagement at times of second level transition.
- Improved career guidance skills in exploring and developing entrepreneurial careers as a platform for the inclusion of differently abled students into mainstream higher education and careers.
- A role for career guidance with ESL, including prompt intervention.

Other Points

It would also be interesting to capture how cuts to this service in post primary have been felt in the system for both students and teachers.

There may also be scope to look at the move from Career Guidance to Career Coaching and what tools and techniques are used and the extent to which they are available to learners, particularly for adult learners.

Finally, HECA, has strived to establish the private and independent higher education sector as a valid contributor to career development and growth and it welcomes Indecon's invitation for its contribution on the Review of Career Guidance.