

## **GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN IRISH SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS**

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The paper begins with a description of guidance and counselling in second-level schools in the Republic of Ireland, tracing development of the service from its introduction in the mid-1960s to the early 1990s. The role of the guidance counsellor is considered in the contexts of educational, vocational, and career guidance; appraisal and assessment; personal counselling; and subject teaching. Interactions between guidance counsellors and school colleagues, parents, and external agencies also receive attention. Following the discussion of issues relating to the delivery and effectiveness of the service, some of the more urgent research needs revealed in the review are outlined.

A guidance and counselling service for second-level schools was formally established in Irish schools by the Department of Education in 1966. This initiative followed the appointment in 1960 of the first educational psychologist with responsibility for developing a guidance service in the schools of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The City of Dublin VEC continues to provide services to vocational schools in its area, while schools in other VEC areas are serviced by the Department of Education. In this paper, we consider the development of the Department of Education's service with a view to identifying information needs and research issues which require attention as the service approaches its 30th anniversary. While undertaking our review, we conducted a search of journals published in the Republic of Ireland and abroad to locate articles dealing with all aspects of the guidance and counselling service in Irish schools. We also consulted persons who are or were directly involved in the development of the service with the purpose of identifying other primary information sources such as official guidelines and reports.

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICE**

The formal establishment of a guidance and counselling service has been attributed to a number of factors including the rapid industrialization that took place in Ireland during the 1960s, a slowing down in emigration, and the availability of a wider range of careers for young people (Chamberlain, 1983). Whatever factors outside the educational system gave rise to its introduction, the

notion of providing guidance and counselling was readily accepted in schools, many of which were already doing so on an informal basis (O'Connor & Walshe, 1979). Following the introduction of the service, provision was at a relatively high level by international standards until 1983. Up until that year, a guidance counsellor could be appointed in addition to regular teaching staff, on an 'ex-quota' basis, in schools with 250 or more students. In 1983, this threshold was raised to 500. In effect, this meant that if schools with fewer than 500 students wished to employ a guidance counsellor, they had to do so within the overall staff allocation of the school. In 1991, provision for expansion of the service was made in a proposal for the 'recognition on an ex-quota basis of 0.5 of a whole-time post for guidance in schools in the 350-499 enrolment category' (Ireland, 1991). It was envisaged that the service would be expanded on a phased basis, starting with schools at the upper end of the specified enrolment category.

Relatively little published information is available on the evolution of the guidance and counselling service in schools. In a paper prepared by officials of the Department of Education in 1979, it was reported that as many as 400 guidance counsellors were active in schools (O'Connor & Walshe, 1979). The findings of a survey conducted by members of the Department of Education's Psychological Service in 1984-85 showed that 69% of 316 second-level schools offered a guidance and counselling service, but that the extent of the service had been substantially reduced since 1983 in 25% of the schools (Ireland Department of Education, 1987). In a survey of 78 second-level schools conducted by the Department of Education's School Guidance Committee in 1985, 78% of the schools were found to have a guidance counsellor on the staff on an 'ex-quota' (36%), not 'ex-quota' (35%) or shared-between-schools (7%) basis (Ireland Department of Education, 1987). In a survey of 667 second-level schools conducted by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors during the 1989-90 school year, although 78% of schools were found to offer some guidance and counselling, 5% of community/comprehensive schools, 18% of secondary schools, and 34% of vocational schools offered no service (Institute of Guidance Counsellors, 1990). Finally, McCarthy (1993b) reported that lack of access to guidance and counselling was a problem in need of attention in rural areas where schools generally have fewer than 350 students, and/or where students attend vocational schools.

Current information needs regarding the nature and extent of the guidance and counselling service include a breakdown of the distribution of the service by school type, size, and location. In addition, information on the extent to which guidance and counselling are provided on an 'ex-quota' basis and teachers other than trained guidance counsellors are engaged in these activities would be useful.

In the absence of such information, it is difficult to describe the extent of the service or to identify its immediate needs.

Recent international (OECD, 1991) as well as national (Ireland, 1992) publications have called for the recruitment of more guidance counsellors, particularly for schools located in areas of disadvantage. However, while commitments to increase the number of guidance counsellors are reflected in financial provisions included in the budget in recent years, there is no information which would allow us to assess the effects of any new appointments that have been made on the inequalities in the guidance service noted above.

From an outsider's perspective, the institutional framework supporting the guidance and counselling service seems well developed. In the first instance, support is offered through the education and training of guidance counsellors, particularly by way of provision of specialist university courses. Guidance counsellors are generally recruited from the ranks of serving second-level teachers and must have a minimum of three years teaching experience. Typically, they have a primary degree in arts or commerce (O'Connor & Walshe, 1979) and they usually complete an additional one-year full-time post-graduate diploma course in guidance counselling at a third-level institution. Two such courses are currently offered — one was established at University College Dublin in 1967, the other at University College Cork in 1981. Altogether, about 25 teachers enrol in these two courses each year. Counsellors in training are paid full salary and their schools may appoint a replacement teacher. A post-graduate degree with a guidance and counselling option is offered at Trinity College, Dublin. However, while a number of options exist for teachers wishing to pursue a career in guidance and counselling, no evaluation has been carried out that might help to assess the adequacy of the training provided.

A second form of support for the guidance and counselling service is available from educational psychologists who are employed by the Department of Education. These psychologists or inspectors of guidance services, as they are also known, are nominally responsible for supervising the work of guidance counsellors and for assisting them in a consultative and advisory capacity. In practice, depending on the nature of particular circumstances, the relationship between guidance counsellors and the psychologists may be closer than this description suggests. However, the fact that only one psychologist is available for every 17,000 students must be regarded as a serious constraint on the amount of official support that guidance counsellors can typically expect to call on. If, for example, as is not unusual, a psychologist or inspector of guidance services is allocated 50 schools, this means, in effect, that he or she can spend an average of only three days in the school year dealing with cases referred from each of those schools.

Additional support for guidance counsellors is provided by the Irish Institute of Guidance Counsellors. The Institute, a professional organization which was set up in 1968, organizes conferences, workshops, and seminars for its members, of whom there were in excess of 600 in 1993. The Institute also publishes professional guidelines, policy documents, and a journal.

#### THE ROLE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR

The role of guidance counsellors in schools has received a fair amount of attention in research studies since the late 1970s (see Chamberlain & Delaney, 1977, Ireland Department of Education, 1987, McCarthy, 1985, O'Brien Tuite, McDonagh, & Deffely, 1982-83, O'Connor & Walshe, 1979, O'Leary & Adams, 1986, O'Leary & McCay-Morrissey, 1987, Ryan, 1993). There is considerable variation in the nature and size of the samples on which studies were based. For example, the range of studies includes a relatively small-scale local study in 18 Cork schools (O'Leary & McCay-Morrissey, 1987), a major study of subject provision, choice, and allocation involving a nationally representative sample of second-level schools in which 68 counsellors provided information about their work (Hannan, Breen, Murray, Watson, Hardiman, & O'Higgins, 1983), and a study based on a sample drawn from the membership of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors involving 340 counsellors (Ryan, 1993).

In official documentation, the role of the guidance counsellor is discussed in relation to three broad areas: the provision of information about educational, vocational, and career choices, appraisal and assessment, and counselling for those experiencing learning or personal difficulties (Ireland, 1992). This classification, which is adopted in the present review, is broadly in line with the categorization of different aspects of the guidance counsellor's role in published research. It is useful to the extent that it points up the broad range of activities envisaged as part of the guidance counsellor's role. In practice, the emphasis given to each of these activities is likely to vary depending on such factors as school ethos, the interests and preferences of counsellors themselves, and the functions assigned to other teachers in a school.

#### *Information about Educational, Vocational, and Career Choices*

A consistent finding of research studies is that educational, vocational, and career counselling is the main activity of guidance counsellors (Hannan *et al*, 1983, McCarthy, 1985, O'Leary & McCay-Morrissey, 1987, Ryan, 1993). This dimension of the counsellor's role encompasses providing students with guidance in subject choice, information about careers, information about

vocational training opportunities, and assistance in the application procedures for admission to advanced second-level and third-level courses in Ireland and other countries. Most educational and career counselling is conducted at the senior-cycle level. For example, in one study it was found that 64% of a guidance counsellor's time was devoted to students in the senior cycle (Ireland. Department of Education, 1987). However, some guidance in subject choice is often provided at the beginning of the junior cycle as well (Hannan *et al*, 1983).

The fact that students' post-school options are largely determined by their performance in public examinations limits the extent to which a guidance counsellor is in a position to help students arrive at decisions relating to career choice. Nevertheless, the guidance counsellor's role in providing information about careers and courses of study has become more complex in recent years. Reasons for this development include an increase in the proportion of students who stay in school after the Junior Certificate examination; an increase in the range of senior-cycle courses and post-Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs); and the expansion of third-level education and training options at home and abroad.

While counsellors may be involved in vocational preparation courses and transition education programmes (see Hannan, 1986; Kellaghan & Lewis, 1991) and may set up opportunities for students to obtain experience of work in local industries, the specific nature of their involvement in this area has not been documented. The uncertainty regarding the nature of career information provided by guidance counsellors is reflected in a recent call by the Irish Business and Employer's Federation (IBEC) for the appointment of a corps of career guidance officers who would be independent of the school system and other institutions and would 'provide a structured system of work experience at second level, supply career information to schools, and establish appropriate linkages with local employment and training interests' (IBEC, 1993, p.16). Whether or not such a move would be welcomed by schools in general and counsellors in particular is a matter for discussion. In any event, some of the uncertainty surrounding the provision of career guidance could be reduced if research were undertaken to establish the effectiveness of current approaches and identify aspects that may need improvement.

### *Appraisal and Assessment*

Appraisal and assessment of students is also an important part of the guidance counsellor's work (Chamberlain & Delaney, 1977; O'Leary & McCay-Morrissey, 1987). According to the government Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World*, the purpose of appraisal and assessment is to 'enable the school to understand the needs of the student, as well as helping students and their

parents to understand themselves better' (Ireland, 1992, p 107) The available literature tells us little about how counsellors combine formal and informal assessment information to advise students regarding their choice of subjects and suitability for careers and/or advanced courses, or how counsellors gather and use assessment information in order to advise students about personal problems. However, some research has been published on the range of tests that counsellors use in assessing students and on the characteristics and usefulness of such tests.

In a survey of guidance counsellors in 74 second-level schools in County Dublin, MacNamara (1989) found that counsellors most frequently administered group tests of 'aptitude' such as the Differential Aptitude Tests (Educational Research Centre, 1975) and the AH4 Group Test of General Intelligence (Heim, 1970). The primary reasons cited by the counsellors for using such tests were to help students choose senior-cycle subjects and make career choices. The counsellors also indicated that the results of psychological tests provided more useful information than that obtained through interviewing parents, interviewing pupils, or examining public examination results. Only interviews with subject teachers appeared to provide more useful information than the tests.

A difficulty in using the results of psychological tests to predict academic performance at the end of second-level education, and hence the probability of gaining entry into specific third-level courses, is that the correlation between such tests and performance on the Leaving Certificate Examination may not be very high. Martin and O'Rourke (1984) found that, depending on the points scheme that is used for Leaving Certificate Examination results and student gender, between 26% and 44% of variance in overall performance on the Leaving Certificate Examination could be accounted for by performance on the verbal and numerical (VR-NA) subtests of the Differential Aptitude Tests (DAT) taken some 30 months earlier. The DAT predicted overall examination performance better than it predicted performance in individual subjects.

The use in Irish schools of personality questionnaires which have been conceptualized and normed elsewhere was questioned in a study by Greaney and Martin (1984) who concluded that the American High-School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ), which some Irish counsellors administer, was unsuitable for guidance and counselling purposes in this country. Two reasons were given for this conclusion: the low levels of reliability (internal consistency) of the factors tapped by the test and the lack of normative data for an Irish population. These observations suggest that counsellors should exercise considerable care in selecting questionnaires and tests, interpreting results, and communicating the results to students.

Given that schools are provided with financial assistance by the Department of Education to purchase psychological tests, and that counsellors who routinely administer such tests claim that the information they obtain is valuable to them, it is surprising that virtually no research has been conducted on the uses to which such tests are put by guidance counsellors, or on how students themselves interpret and use test results in arriving at career-related decisions. One important issue relates to the criteria that counsellors adopt in interpreting test results for students. We may ask, for example, to what extent counsellors operate from a talent-matching perspective, attempting to match students with careers for which they appear to be suitable, or from an educational perspective, emphasizing the development of skills, knowledge, and experiences that would enable students to make and implement their own decisions (see Watts, 1993). In addition to research which would examine how counsellors and their students interpret differences in performance across tests, and the implications of such differences for career-related decisions, there is also need for research that would investigate how counsellors gather biographical data, what vocational preference measures they use, and how they advise students on the outcomes of assessment.

#### *Personal and Social Counselling*

In addition to providing career, educational, and vocational guidance, and conducting assessments, many counsellors provide personal counselling to individual students who request it. In fact, guidance counsellors have described personal counselling as one of their most important activities after career guidance. Between 70 and 80% of counsellors in Hannan *et al's* (1983) study claimed either significant or main involvement in personal counselling at junior- and senior-cycle levels, though this involvement was less important than senior-cycle subject-advisory functions, and substantially less important than involvement in facilitating career choice at both levels. The 61 counsellors who responded to the 1985 survey of the School Guidance Committee ranked individual personal counselling as the activity in which they engaged most frequently at junior-cycle level. The same counsellors ranked individual personal counselling fifth behind vocational and educational counselling (for individuals and class-size groups) at the senior-cycle level (Ireland. Department of Education, 1987).

While most of the 340 counsellors in a survey conducted by Ryan (1993) also indicated that they regarded personal counselling as a major part of their work, the amount of time they devoted to this activity varied in different parts of the country. Counsellors working in urban schools reported that they spent significantly more time on personal counselling than their counterparts in schools located in small towns and rural areas. If guidance counsellors have the

main responsibility for the provision of personal counselling in their schools, as Hannan and his colleagues reported, it would seem that schools that have counsellors and are located outside large urban areas should be especially alert to the possibility that they may not be adequately meeting the personal counselling needs of their students

An important aspect of personal counselling is the range of problems addressed by counsellors and the support that they receive in addressing these problems. From Ryan's (1993) data, it is clear 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. Most counsellors who participated in Ryan's study felt that the functions of career guidance and personal counselling should be integrated in the treatment of these problems. However, they reported that some of their guidance colleagues and officials in the Department of Education took a different view, suggesting that counselling should be related primarily to education, and should concentrate on improving study skills and confidence, instilling discipline, and developing relationships with teachers. While, ultimately, the best approach is one which suits the particular needs of individual schools and takes account of the availability and adequacy of referral services, it would seem important that counsellors and their supervisors work together on goals and strategies that are appropriate and sufficiently broad to enable schools to meet the needs of students.

The extent to which the work of counsellors is effective in assisting students with personal problems is unclear. This issue was raised in a recent study involving interviews with young people who had left second-level education five years earlier. The study concluded that 'there is a need to considerably improve the content and quality of personal and social development education and pastoral-care programmes in schools. These goals are given very high priority by school leavers, and rather low satisfaction marks result for their schools' (Hannan & Shortall, 1991, p. 6). Given that guidance counsellors provide some instruction in personal and social development skills (see Chamberlain, 1988), they may need more information and feedback to plan and develop this aspect of the service in ways which would enable them to address a wide range of student needs. To begin with, information might be obtained which would allow appraisal of overall provision of personal counselling services with a view to identifying strengths and weaknesses. Then, using a case-study approach, an examination of how personal counselling is conducted, and its effects on counsellors, students, and their parents could be undertaken in a number of schools.



### *Subject Teaching*

The involvement of guidance counsellors in time-tabled non-guidance subject teaching is an important issue in the context of available time for counselling activities. At present 'ex-quota' guidance counsellors must provide a minimum of eight hours guidance and counselling if they work in VEC schools and a minimum of 12 hours if they work in community, comprehensive, or secondary schools. In addition they are required to teach a school subject for at least three hours per week (Ireland. Department of Education, 1983).

In the School Guidance Committee's survey (Ireland. Department of Education, 1987), counsellors who were 'ex quota' reported teaching a school subject for an average of 5 hours per week, while counsellors who were not 'ex-quota' reported an average figure of 9 hours per week. In most cases, the school principal, working within official parameters, decides how the guidance counsellor's time is allocated. As indicated earlier, counsellors who engage in more subject teaching have less time available for counselling in general, and personal counselling in particular, than their counterparts who do not have a strong involvement in subject teaching. The tensions in combining subject teaching and counselling are underlined in the following dilemma. On the one hand, freeing guidance counsellors from subject teaching duties would allow them to provide more guidance and counselling; on the other, greater involvement in subject teaching might afford them valuable contact with students in a non-guidance setting as well as leading to more effective relationships with colleagues who are engaged in subject-teaching on a full-time basis.

In general, the available research findings indicate that counsellors prefer to do some subject teaching in addition to performing their counselling duties, but not as much as they are typically assigned (O'Leary, 1987; O'Leary & Adams, 1986). The principal teachers in O'Leary's (1987) study were in agreement with guidance counsellors regarding the amount of time (0 to 6 hours per week) that should be allocated to subject teaching. Even so, these principals also reported that they allocated significantly more subject-teaching hours to counsellors; only 50% of teachers in the study were engaged in teaching for fewer than six hours per week. O'Leary makes the point that, while the report of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (1985) did not perceive subject teaching as part of the guidance counsellor's role, guidance counsellors in her study generally felt that they should do some subject teaching. A useful research contribution might be to examine what benefits, if any, accrue from guidance counsellors engaging in non-guidance subject teaching — particularly when it is argued that counsellors have

insufficient time for guidance and counselling. It would be worthwhile, for example, to compare how the role of the counsellor is perceived by teachers and students in settings where counsellors have little or no involvement in subject teaching and in settings where counsellors perform substantial subject teaching duties.

#### THE WORK OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR IN SCHOOL ORGANIZATION AND EXTERNAL CONTEXTS

According to the Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World* (Ireland, 1992), the provision of guidance 'should be seen as a school-wide responsibility, involving the collaboration of the school administration, the guidance counsellor, and other teachers' (p. 107). This view sees counsellors as playing a pivotal role in many different aspects of the organization and co-ordination of guidance-related activities in schools. However, the available research findings indicate that counsellors do not exercise strong leadership roles within schools. Hannan *et al* (1983) found that, while counsellors were involved to some extent in the initial selection and assessment of students, they had no influence in determining the number and structure of classes (e.g., whether streamed or banded) or the packaging of subjects. They recommended that, in addition to having some input in these areas, counsellors should become more involved in establishing relationships between subject teachers, students, and their parents and in developing and evaluating curricular and instructional interventions to deal with conventional school failure. However, it has to be borne in mind that, given current constraints on guidance activities, any attempts to broaden the role of guidance counsellors in these areas could mean a reduction of their services in other areas.

#### *Pastoral-Care Programmes*

An area in which counsellors may become more involved in the future is in the provision of personal and social education through the development of pastoral-care programmes. These programmes, which have been a feature of counselling in second-level schools in England and elsewhere for many years (see Lang, 1993), are usually devised by a pastoral-care team consisting of the guidance counsellor and subject teachers who volunteer to act as tutors or special class teachers to individual class groups. According to Chamberlain (1988), there is substantial overlap between the content of typical pastoral-care programmes — self-awareness training, information on the transition from primary to secondary schools, subject choice, study skills, examination techniques, responsibility/decision-making skills, and life skills — and the

content that is often found in the conventional guidance programmes offered in Irish second-level schools. The widespread development of pastoral-care programmes would allow counsellors to become more involved with subject teachers on a professional basis. With some counselling duties devolving to the subject teachers, this arrangement might provide counsellors with additional time in which to concentrate on other aspects of their work.

Some basic research on the nature and extent of pastoral-care services currently operating in second-level schools could contribute to a greater understanding of pastoral care, improve its development, and ultimately allow more students to experience its benefits. At present, little is known about the involvement of counsellors in such programmes which may also be offered in schools as civics, personal and health education, religious education and chaplaincy, or personal and social development programmes. It would be useful to look at existing situations in which guidance counsellors are successfully leading pastoral-care programmes within schools with a view to identifying and disseminating elements of good practice. It might also be useful to compare the delivery and effectiveness of such programmes when they are implemented by guidance counsellors and by other staff members, including subject teachers and year or form heads, who may not have specialist training.

#### *Partnerships with Parents*

Another area in which guidance counsellors' activities might broaden in the future is in their partnerships with parents. Several researchers have pointed out that parents are a particularly important influence on their children's career decisions and that counsellors regularly meet with them (Ireland. Department of Education, 1987; McCarthy, 1993b; O'Brien, Tuite, McDonagh, & Deffeley, 1982-83; O'Leary & McCay-Morrissey, 1987). At this point, however, relatively little is known about how counsellors and parents work together to assist the career choices of students. While recognition of the need for greater parental involvement in guidance and counselling has been expressed (Hannan *et al*, 1983; O'Leary & McCay-Morrissey, 1987), it seems important that the development of such links be based on a shared understanding of how parents and counsellors can co-operate to assist young people in making educational and career-related decisions. The current involvement of the Department of Education's Psychological Service in a European-wide project on enhancing the role of parents in guidance may provide counsellors with new insights on how to involve parents more effectively in guidance.

### *Links with External Agencies*

Yet another aspect of the guidance counsellor's work involves liaison with agencies outside the school including government departments, places of employment and training, and third-level colleges, in order to obtain information regarding educational and career opportunities and, increasingly, to secure work-experience placements for students. The respective roles of the Department of Enterprise and Employment (formerly the Department of Labour) and the Department of Education require further clarification, particularly in relation to the provision of career-related information (McCarthy, 1986). While it is not difficult to accept that the quality of guidance may be affected by factors relating to the provision and flow of career-related information, the precise ways in which guidance counsellors or students might be affected in practical terms from this administrative arrangement have not been explored. Further, no research has been carried out on the appropriateness or value of the career information, including published materials, that is provided to schools by state agencies.

Relatively little is known either about the nature and effectiveness of the links between school guidance counsellors and human resources personnel in industry. Only one study in this area was identified. In a survey of 150 companies carried out by the Confederation of Irish Industry (CII), now known as the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), 42% reported that a school's career guidance counsellor had been in contact with their firm in the previous two years. Smaller firms were much less likely to have been contacted (19% compared with 59% for larger firms). The most popular initiatives with respect to school-industry links were company visits by students, career talks by industrialists/business people, career seminars, and career exhibitions. Of the 150 companies, just 31% felt that information concerning careers in industry was being passed on to post-primary students in an appropriate manner (CII, 1990).

In the absence of additional research on the range and effectiveness of existing links between guidance counsellors and industry, it is difficult to determine whether current arrangements are operating satisfactorily. Clearly, calls for the appointment of external career officers (see IBEC, 1993) must be evaluated in the context of the objectives of the guidance service provided in schools, the links which guidance counsellors have established with industry and the initiatives taken by industry to foster links with schools.

### *Irish-European Guidance Links*

The past several years have seen the development of links between guidance counsellors in Irish second-level schools and their counterparts in other countries in the European Community. These links have been supported by various

programmes. One such programme, PETRA, an action programme for vocational education and training, has provided funding and expertise for improving the quality of vocational education and training in member states. An important element of this initiative has been the establishment of national co-ordination units (NCUs) and national guidance centres in all member states. Two guidance centres were set up in Ireland in 1992 — the PETRA/NCU National Vocational Guidance Centre, and the FÁS National Occupation and Career Guidance Centre. The PETRA/NCU National Vocational Guidance Centre, in partnership with the National Information in Technology Centre (NITEC), has contributed to the development of and access to the QUALIFAX database. This database was designed and compiled by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and aims to provide school leavers in Ireland and in other countries with information about vocational, technical, and higher education opportunities in this country. The PETRA/NCU Centre has also involved guidance personnel in a variety of action-research projects relating to guidance in general, and to the European dimension of guidance in particular. These projects, involving close co-operation with experts and counsellors in other member states, have as their objectives the provision of non-formal guidance to disadvantaged youth and the development of standards for guidance. The FÁS Centre has been involved in projects dealing with comparability of training qualifications across member states, and in providing information about training opportunities in other countries to young persons. Finally, the Department of Education's Psychological Service has been working with its European counterparts in Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, the Netherlands, and Portugal, on PETRA-funded projects. These involve the preparation of modules for the initial and continuing training of guidance counsellors in the European dimension of guidance, the development of joint quality standards in guidance, and the preparation of methods and materials for enhancing the role of parents in guidance (McCarthy, 1993a).

While the number of school leavers currently seeking information about opportunities for vocational education and training in Europe may be small, it can be expected to increase. Moreover, European Community initiatives, such as PETRA, may serve to link the different organizations involved in the provision of guidance services in this country and to familiarize Irish guidance counsellors with a variety of approaches to service provision. The effects of the PETRA-sponsored projects are as yet unclear as only preliminary reports are available at this time (e.g., Ireland. Department of Education, n.d.). To evaluate the overall impact of the projects, it would be necessary to look not only at the effects of individual projects, but also at linkages across projects and the extent

to which activities promoted by the projects become an integral part of national policy and state structures (McCarthy, 1993a)

#### THE DELIVERY AND EFFECTS OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

In addition to a lack of research on various dimensions of the guidance counsellor's role, there is a lack of basic information about the delivery of guidance services within schools. No data are available on the specific content of guidance and counselling programmes, or on the ways in which guidance counsellors present information to students. It is important that the gaps in information in these areas receive attention if our understanding of how counsellors present information to students and lead students to make informed decisions is to be improved. In the absence of such work, it is difficult to see how effective guidance practices can be recognized, let alone disseminated or explained to parents and colleagues.

Overall appraisal of the service should take into account the changing climate within which it is being provided. In particular, such an appraisal should consider several recent developments which may be having a considerable influence on how students and their parents obtain career guidance information. These developments include the increasing numbers of students who stay at school beyond the minimum school-leaving age, the introduction of new junior and senior-cycle curricula and examinations, the increased role of the media in providing information and advice about post-school options and third-level provision in particular, the provision of public seminars and exhibitions in recent years on work and career options for second-level students, the expansion of school-based work-experience programmes which have career guidance as an objective and the development and use of career videos and computerized career information including European databases.

#### *Evaluation of Guidance Outcomes*

There are a number of ways in which evaluation of the effects of guidance and counselling might be undertaken. Perhaps the most basic approach towards evaluating outcomes might involve obtaining a detailed description of the nature and extent of guidance from guidance counsellors and students. This approach could be adopted in the context of examining the guidance and counselling system in general as well as specific interventions or programmes. A second approach might be based on an examination of students' satisfaction with their guidance experiences with a view to determining how students felt those experiences had helped them in making personal educational, and career

decisions. Some use of this approach has already been made in one Irish study. The findings showed that students considered counsellors to have been more involved than other teachers in providing them with advice and information about subject choice and careers, but that the *influence* of counsellors was less than that of parents and friends. Girls, in particular, emphasized the importance of friends in helping them to select careers (Hannan *et al.*, 1983).

These two approaches would pose relatively few methodological problems to researchers. However, they would not provide specific information on the processes of guidance or on its outcomes in terms of learning or economic gains. A third approach would be required to investigate how students fare in education, training, and jobs and to relate these outcomes to the guidance they received in school. A problem with this approach, which would require longitudinal research, is that it would involve efforts to distinguish the effects of good guidance (e.g., the development of effective decision-making skills) from the effects of other influences, including the ability of the guidance counsellor to predict appropriate and likely outcomes for students. A fourth approach to evaluation, described by Stoney (1993), would be to measure the attitudes and knowledge that students receive from guidance by developing and using appropriate pre- and post-guidance instruments. Such an approach could yield information on the effects of different levels of guidance on students and the effects of guidance on different groups of students, taking into account such factors as student gender, family background, and the geographical location of schools.

#### CONCLUSION

Published research on guidance and counselling in Irish second-level schools has consisted of the collection, analysis, and publication of survey results and interview data, and has provided valuable descriptions of the development of the guidance service, the conditions, roles, and attitudes of counsellors, and the types of problems that counsellors encounter as they work with students in school settings. Research has also provided some general insights into the nature of students' guidance needs in the context of current economic and social difficulties. However, no major investigation has been carried out to examine specifically provision and practices relating to guidance and counselling in Irish schools. Neither has there been any evaluation of the training provided for guidance counsellors or of the support services (including in-service education) established to assist them.

Underlying most of the papers and reports considered in this review is a recognition of the need for more comprehensive research. For example, in the *Report of the School Guidance Committee* (Ireland Department of Education, 1987), it was noted that 'a well planned system of evaluation is necessary to improve and develop a guidance and counselling service' (p 79). Similarly, McCarthy (1993b) noted that 'the usage of counselling services is largely untabulated and the evaluation of services in terms of meeting customers' needs appears non-existent' (p 1). The lack of primary research may be attributed to several factors. First, until relatively recently, there has not been a strong tradition of formal programme evaluation in Irish education, much less a tradition of evaluating students' perceptions of the value of the educational services they have received. Services which are comparable to guidance and counselling in terms of size and structure, such as remedial education and special education, have not been evaluated in any comprehensive manner either. Second, although specific aims for guidance and counselling have been proposed (see Ireland Department of Education, 1987), there does not appear to be a consensus on the emphases that counsellors should place on different aspects of their work, or on how their work should affect students. This creates problems for designing an evaluation study. Third, since the guidance and counselling field is relatively new, most of the initial effort has been focused on developing the service without due attention to issues of effectiveness. Clearly, however, policy makers, counsellors themselves, and, ultimately, students and their parents, would benefit from systematic evaluation of guidance programmes in schools, and proposals for providing additional resources or expanding guidance and counselling services would stand on firmer ground.

Based on our review, the following issues emerge as important areas of concern and research inquiry. First and foremost, there is need for data on the extent of the guidance and counselling service in second-level schools, including a breakdown of the number of counsellors who are 'ex-quota' and not 'ex-quota' in different types of schools and in different locations. Second, there is need to examine the nature of career guidance information provided to students and to evaluate the adequacy of such information. Ideally, this would involve an examination of the links between counsellors and external agencies, taking into account the objectives of provision in schools and other information sources including work-experience placements, parents, media output, and public exhibitions and seminars. Third, there is need to know how counsellors use formal and informal assessment information to advise students regarding subject choice and their suitability for careers and/or advanced courses. Research on this issue would have to consider the range and appropriateness of assessment



measures in use in schools and the ways in which guidance counsellors obtain informal assessment information. A fourth area of inquiry concerns the rather sensitive issue of personal counselling. Research on this aspect of the service needs to focus on the relative needs of students in urban and rural schools and in disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged areas. It might involve identification of the models or approaches that counsellors use in working with students, an examination of the links that evolve between parents and counsellors as specific problems are addressed, as well as some evaluation of the quality of personal counselling from the student's point of view. Fifth, the nature and effectiveness of pastoral-care programmes deserves attention. Specifically, we need to know more about such programmes from a school organization perspective, about the involvement of guidance counsellors and other teachers in pastoral-care programmes, and about the ways in which such programmes affect relationships between counsellors, students, and other teachers. Sixth, the use of technology in guidance and counselling should be explored, taking into account the contribution of European databases and networks, in order to identify effective practices and ongoing needs. Access to technology in schools, the adequacy of counsellors' skills for using technology, and students' responses to technology are some of the more obvious issues that might be examined in this context. Last, but not least, it seems imperative that some consideration be given to the ways in which the general effectiveness of the guidance and counselling service might be monitored on an on-going basis.

Concern about the ability of the guidance and counselling service to adapt to changing circumstances and needs underlies many of the research issues identified in this review. Obviously, the current educational and social environment is very different from the one in which the service was first established. There are now fewer small schools in the system, many fewer religious in schools who in the past would have contributed in no small part to the pastoral care/guidance dimension of educational provision, and much greater numbers of students particularly at senior-cycle level. These, together with other changes outside the school system, which have resulted in a huge increase in the range of options and in the amount of information available to young people, must be regarded as key issues in any appraisal of the guidance and counselling service.

The potential value of research in generating information about the guidance and counselling service in schools has been underlined throughout the paper. The issues presented for discussion emerge essentially from a research perspective. We trust that they find support in the concerns of policy-makers and practitioners who undoubtedly have their own information requirements which

we were not in a position to identify or express in this paper. In conclusion, we may emphasize again the need to resource substantial improvements in information about guidance and counselling in schools. Without such information, it is impossible to know if the administrators and counsellors who run the service or the pupils and parents who use it are being well served.

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