



National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

Curriculum framework for Guidance (Post-Primary)

Report on consultation with schools

September 2008

Contents

Section 1: Background	5
Section 2: Implementing the NCCA framework	11
Section 3: The student responses	19
Section 4: Findings from the consultation	29
Conclusion	33
Appendix 1 School Questionnaire 1	37
Appendix 2 School Questionnaire 2	39
Appendix 3 Questionnaire for students	45

Section 1: Background

The report on the consultation on the NCCA document, *A Curriculum Framework for Guidance in Post-Primary Education: Discussion Paper*, published in November 2007, indicated that following the approval of Council a further strand of consultation with schools should take place. The consultation would seek to determine the potential impact of the curriculum framework on guidance provision in the schools.

Four schools participated in the consultation (information on the selection is included below) and an initial meeting with each of the school principals and the guidance counsellor/s was held in November 2007. At this meeting the curriculum framework and draft questionnaires for schools and students were reviewed; each school agreed to set up a small working party to consider its responses to the questions over the period of November 2007 to January 2008. The schools were not asked to implement the curriculum framework, but to consider, in the light of their current provision, the likely implications of the whole-school approach to guidance advocated in the framework. In addition, the schools agreed to administer questionnaires to students in first and third years and to students preparing for Leaving Certificate. The school and student questionnaires are included in the Appendix material with this report.

Current provision of guidance within the schools

The schools, falling within the broad catchment area of Kilkenny Education Centre, were chosen primarily on the basis of their size and the number of guidance hours available in them. As an informal consultation with a small group of school principals from the Carlow and Kilkenny areas had been conducted during the first phase of the consultation, Kilkenny Education Centre was approached on this occasion to facilitate a more in-depth engagement on the issues identified in the earlier consultation. The consultation with schools allowed for seeking the views of students, an element which had been specifically requested by Council. The perspective of parents had been incorporated in the earlier consultation report.

School details provided in response to School Questionnaire 1 are outlined in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Participating schools

School	Location	Enrolment	DEIS	Guidance Enhancement Scheme	Guidance Hours	Guidance Counsellor Teaching
Willow Garden	Urban	15 F 955 M (970)	No	Application unsuccessful	2 Full Time (1.73)	Both involved in some subject teaching
Elm River	Urban	336 F 300 M (636)	No	Application unsuccessful – has since gained hours due to increased enrolment	1 Full Time	2 SPHE classes
Oak Ridge	Rural	188 F 222 M (410)	Yes	Yes .75 allocation increased to 1 full time	1 Full Time	5 th year Maths, Coordinator PLC in Childcare, LCA
Ash Grove	Rural	216 F 128 M (344)	Yes	Yes .25	11 Hours	History and RE

Responses to School Questionnaire 1 indicated that guidance provision was organised differently from school to school, although a pivotal role was played by the guidance counsellor/s in all cases. Willow Garden, the largest school, planned its provision through a guidance team, in operation since September 2007, which the school questionnaire described as being *very good for setting short, medium and long term goals*. Elm River described the organisation of its guidance programme as developing *in consultation with principal and SPHE teachers of 1st, 2nd and 3rd years... [through]...periodic meetings with SPHE department... [and]...consultation with RE department in senior cycle*. The organisation of the guidance programme in Oak Ridge emerged as the near-exclusive remit of the guidance counsellor who *has a steering role in provision of guidance and coordinates pastoral care teams and support for students and parents, and provides assistance to subject teachers in their role*. In Ash Grove, the smallest of the schools, the eleven hour allocation of guidance time was

devoted mainly to *in class and one-to-one for senior cycle by the guidance counsellor*. In addition, class tutors in this school had one class period per week for guidance, about which the school expressed satisfaction although it reported that it would like to use this time more effectively.

The schools reported being happiest with the following elements of their guidance programmes:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Willow Garden | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ having a range of programmes suited to all their students – JCSP, junior cycle, LCA and LC (Established)▪ having an induction programme for first years▪ addressing questions of subject choice▪ having a very good SPHE programme▪ having one-to-one counselling▪ relating/communicating well with parents |
| Elm River | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ educational guidance programmes in senior cycle and 3rd year▪ the involvement of the SPHE team in guidance▪ focusing on personal development for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years▪ having a well-planned and coordinated Transition Year |
| Oak Ridge | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ having flexibility, time and space to deal with student issues as they arise▪ supporting parents around the third level ACCESS programmes▪ engaging with specialist personnel, e.g. psychologists and occupational therapists▪ engagement with FÁS and Agricultural Colleges |
| Ash Grove | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ one-to-one guidance working well▪ having a timetabled guidance period for class tutors |

Looking towards the future development of guidance, the schools reported that they would like to:

- Willow Garden
 - see students met on an individual basis more frequently
 - see greater involvement from parents
 - have a greater emphasis on health education

- Elm River
 - extend aspects of SPHE formally to senior cycle
 - develop a comprehensive guidance plan
 - encourage all teachers to see guidance at the core of their relationship with students – building teacher awareness

- Oak Ridge
 - expressed satisfaction with its current programme

- Ash Grove
 - have a greater input at junior cycle, especially for those at risk of dropping out of school
 - see better utilisation of the timetabled guidance period
 - develop a whole-school approach and a guidance team

The schools' **perceptions of the focus of guidance provision** showed some degree of variation. Two of the four schools (Willow Garden and Oak Ridge) saw their guidance provision as focusing equally on the needs of junior and senior cycle students; the other two (Elm River and Ash Grove) saw their provision as being weighted or strongly weighted in favour of senior cycle. Significantly, Elm River, the larger of these two schools—with over 600 students—reported a formal link between its guidance counsellor and SPHE team geared especially towards meeting the educational guidance and personal development needs of students in junior cycle.

Responding to questions on the **balance between personal, educational and career** guidance in their provision, three of the schools indicated a roughly equal balance

between the three areas. The smallest school, Ash Grove, indicated a strong orientation towards career guidance in its provision.

Referring to the **modes of provision** of guidance, the schools indicated that guidance was offered in the following ways:

- timetabled whole class sessions
- occasional whole class or year group sessions
- small group guidance/counselling sessions
- planned one-to-one guidance/counselling sessions
- one-to-one sessions in response to student request
- counselling sessions in times of crisis for individuals.

Schools noted parental request, teacher referrals, and requests from past-pupils for PLC guidance as additional channels through which guidance could be sought and provided.

The four schools that participated in this phase of the consultation differed from each other in the number of guidance hours they had been allocated and in the nature of the guidance programmes they implemented. The character of each of those programmes was determined not merely by the allocation of hours but by decisions taken by the school in setting priorities and managing resources – resources that included, as well as its formal allocation of guidance hours, the collaboration of staff members whose contributions to the school guidance programme were seen as being of a voluntary nature.

Section 2: Implementing the NCCA framework

The material in this section relates to responses to School Questionnaire 2, which sought open-ended responses to a number of statements relating to implementation of the draft curriculum framework for guidance.

Question 1 asked the schools to indicate the changes they would need to make to ensure that, in implementing the framework, **guidance provision would reach all the students – junior cycle and senior cycle**. It is not surprising that responses to this question, and indeed to questions throughout this part of the consultation, could be characterised in the main as calls for additional resources for schools – time for planning and additional input by all teachers, remuneration for teachers who would be asked to increase their involvement in this general area, increased funding for schools to meet the needs arising from implementation of a broader guidance programme involving input from parents and the wider community, and a restructuring of the process of allocation of formal guidance hours for schools.

Time for planning meetings and review of the implementation of the Guidance Plan is the biggest problem. Teachers are under enormous stress because of the workload they have due to all the new curricula coming on stream and are not willing to increase their workloads. If this framework is to be implemented properly then the Junior and Senior cycle curricula need to be restructured where time for planning is built into the hours.

(Willow Garden)

All of the schools drew attention to the need to have a planning group in place, through which the extent and the nature of guidance provision might be identified and negotiated with relevant staff. One school, Elm River, saw the implementation of SPHE in senior cycle as having the potential to make a significant contribution in this regard. This school had indicated that guidance planning was done currently through cooperation between the guidance counsellor, the principal and the SPHE team at junior cycle, and in consultation with the RE department at senior cycle.

When asked how they might ensure that **guidance provision would cover the three areas of personal, educational and career guidance** the schools highlighted some system changes that they felt would be necessary. Two schools referred to the need to formalise the class tutor/year head system.

Class tutors are vital but their role in schools has never been defined. All teachers could be involved here but they need to be paid to do the job.
(Willow Garden)

Year head system is needed with regard to routine personal and social issues.
(Ash Grove)

In this context the schools noted the need for a *comprehensive training programme for participating teachers or more training of staff members in SPHE*. In the view of Willow Garden *most teachers contribute to personal, educational and career guidance*, therefore relevant training and adequate remuneration would be required.

The school with the lowest number of guidance hours, Ash Grove, reported that it would need a *better system of one-to-one counselling* to facilitate a more comprehensive programme.

The third part of Question 1 asked schools to comment on how **guidance provision would involve a team from the school community**. Schools highlighted the potential contribution of a wide range of people such as parents, past pupils, human resource managers from local industry, GPs, community workers, nurses, local development groups, and student representatives. Commenting on the organisational challenge involved in harnessing such potential, however, schools noted the need for extra staffing, more time, and more sustainable structures.

It is certainly done at the moment but if a school is to do it properly they would have events, lectures, seminars, etc. after school time when it would not take from subject class contact hours and when these people are more readily available. A school team could certainly organise this but who would oversee it after school is finished?
(Willow Garden)

Question 1 also asked schools to indicate the changes they would need to bring about so that **guidance provision would help parents to contribute, to support guidance for their children.**

Lack of parent interest/involvement is the greatest block to progress!
(Elm River)

Here schools identified a two-fold challenge – how to ensure that parents are given sufficient information and expertise to allow them to support the guidance work of the school at home, and how to ensure that the school can facilitate parents to share their experience and expertise with others. In this regard, the importance of an effective parents' council or association was stressed by all of the schools. The challenge for the schools was identified as the task of supporting parents in effective and sustainable ways; the challenge for the system lay, according to the schools, in supporting schools to do just that.

The final part of Question 1 asked the schools to indicate what they would need to do to ensure that **guidance would help students to manage their own learning and decision-making.** Schools differed in the ways in which they responded to this question. One saw it as something that was already being achieved through SPHE, CSPE, religion class, home school liaison, and the current work of the guidance team. It identified improved relationships between home and school as most important in this respect – *the best way to help students is to get parents involved more.* Two schools saw curriculum change as being key – more varied approaches to learning, especially project work and life-skills initiatives, more varied teaching approaches, such as small group tuition or the development and adaptation of educational programmes to meet student needs more effectively. One school viewed this question as an opportunity to indicate professional development needs in the area of guidance – training in the use of specialist software relating to study skills, project work, preparation for third level, revision techniques, interest inventories, and so on.

Question 2 invited the schools to consider how **implementing the framework would represent a change in your current model of provision**. The responses of two schools indicated that the change would be largely a question of degree.

The framework is already being implemented but more time is needed for guidance team meetings.

(Willow Garden)

Far more intensive approach...purposeful and planned...involvement of most teaching staff – presently 10 teachers to future 30 – 35 teachers

(Elm River)

A third school, Oak Ridge, saw it involving a greater level of resourcing and planning but with an inevitable reduction of time available for personal counselling:

More formal class [time] to deliver the programme, leading to a perception by students that the guidance counsellor is just another teacher, leading to a reduction in trust, leading to a reduction in disclosure and relationship building.

(Oak Ridge)

Some responses referred to detailed changes the school might make in the focus of its provision, from examining the role 5th year students might play in peer development to giving more of an input to second year students in the area of career guidance.

In recognition of the **tension between the curricular and service dimensions** of guidance that had been highlighted in many of the submissions to the postal and online consultation, Question 3 asked the schools to consider the following:

- the role/significance of one-to-one counselling – the balance between it and other modes of provision
- the particular areas of responsibility they would see as being reserved to the guidance counsellor
- tension/s that might arise from the relationship between the service and curriculum dimensions of guidance.

Responses from the schools were at one in their recognition of the **importance of one-to-one counselling** in meeting the guidance needs of students, especially those experiencing specific problems or difficulties. Schools offered the following perspectives:

We believe that one-to-one counselling is the core work of guidance. Whereas a curriculum can be planned, one-to-one cannot. Our students feel that one-to-one is extremely beneficial and that they gain a lot of clarity and direction from it.

(Ash Grove)

Counselling is a service element but an essential element...one-to-one guidance is most sought after and there is little or no time available

(Elm River)

Certainly in the area of solving problems in relation to depression, suicide, bereavement, and psychological assessment the guidance counsellor is pivotal as he/she is trained whereas others are not...In difficult situations the one-to-one relationship is most important in solving the problem.

(Willow Garden)

Core work is confidentiality. The guidance counsellor is seen by students as someone they can trust, someone that has no issues or conflict with them.

(Oak Ridge)

Nonetheless, two caveats were entered in the submission from Elm River, which has one full-time guidance counsellor and an enrolment of 600 students. These were that while one-to-one guidance was most sought after by students there was *little or no time available* to meet the needs of all and that there was a tension between *student reliance on the guidance counsellor and their own responsibility in taking charge of some guidance for themselves*.

Responding to the invitation to identify the **particular areas of responsibility reserved to the guidance counsellor**, the schools identified the following:

Table 2: Responsibilities reserved to the guidance counsellor

	Responsibility of guidance counsellor	Responsibility of teachers or of the whole school
Willow Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Counselling (one-to-one or group) ▪ Testing ▪ Providing accurate vocational guidance, form-filling for CAO ▪ Managing the educational provision for students with special educational needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Curricular elements generally

	Responsibility of guidance counsellor	Responsibility of teachers or of the whole school
Elm River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal issues affecting students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Career guidance
Oak Ridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Counselling (professional) service ▪ Career advice – most disclosures by students come under the disguise of a career advice request ▪ The steering role in the provision of guidance and the development of the guidance plan 	
Ash Grove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Careers advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educational guidance such as advice on subject choice ▪ Elements of personal counselling in SPHE – health and hygiene

When the schools turned their attention to the **tension/s that might arise from the relationship between the service and curriculum dimensions of guidance** the importance of the guidance counsellor's having a steering role in the development and coordination of the guidance plan was stressed. The response from Ash Grove noted that tension might arise where there is *a danger of the role and professionalism of the guidance counsellor being eroded*. The possible tensions were expressed more succinctly by Elm River in the direct question: *Who does what?*

Question 4 asked the schools to draw up two lists

- a list of aspects of guidance provision that for your school are non-negotiable, these are the essentials that you feel cannot change
- a list of aspects of guidance provision that for your school are open to negotiation

Not surprisingly there was considerable overlap between those elements listed as non-negotiable and the aspects of guidance that schools identified as being of necessity reserved to the guidance counsellor in their responses to Question 3. These included one-to-one counselling, psychometric testing, and offering career advice especially

relating to CAO applications. Other aspects included in the list of non-negotiable aspects were:

- guidance time must remain sacrosanct and not be usurped or deployed for teaching purposes
- guidance allocation to be used only by a qualified guidance counsellor to ensure a 'safe' delivery of the guidance service
- that guidance counsellors have access to psychological reports
- teaching good manners, courtesy, respect for the whole person
- vocational decision-making – social responsibility
- all that aids in completing the tasks of adolescence
- a year head structure
- system of referrals by year heads and teachers to the guidance counsellor/s
- only trained staff to provide one-to-one counselling for students
- certain information should only be given by the guidance counsellor, e.g. CAO
- the use of psychological instruments and discussions based on them must only be delivered by a trained professional

The schools did identify a number of aspects of guidance provision that they felt were open to negotiation. These included:

- delivery of the SPHE curriculum, health education programmes
- study skills sessions/courses for students
- LCVP modules
- management of work-experience modules in Transition Year and of FETAC work experience modules, work placement
- drugs and alcohol education programmes
- how the subject teacher can contribute to personal guidance
- nature of inputs from parents and 'outside' speakers
- some aspects of vocational guidance

- subject choice advice in first and fifth years, an induction programme for first years
- areas of student responsibility in senior cycle

Finally, Question 5 offered the schools the opportunity to provide further, general comment, and three of them availed of this. Willow Garden, the largest school with two guidance counsellors, advised that the allocation of guidance hours be increased. It suggested that teachers would be *unable to do extra work* involved in the implementation of the curriculum framework for guidance. It was the view of this school that the curriculum framework for guidance was a *good idea* and that schools *can and should* implement most of what is in it. To this end, however, the school recommended additional funding and training for all teachers, a recommendation that was supported in the response of Elm River. Furthermore, the response of Elm River recommended that *choice theory* be included as a programme in senior cycle and noted that *students doing the traditional Leaving Certificate are not prepared for the workplace*, unlike those taking LCVP, LCA, and TY.

Responding to Question 5, Oak Ridge outlined a number of specific tasks undertaken by the guidance counsellor, which, in the view of this school, are not included in the curriculum framework, and offered the following general perspective on the nature of guidance in the school:

A lot of the Guidance Counsellor's work cannot be precisely planned for. Pupils need someone in the school who has the time and space—and the trust of the students—to deal with these issues, especially in disadvantaged schools. If you make a class teacher out of the Guidance Counsellor you will lose the existing trust that is there between students and their GC and greatly diminish the effectiveness of the Guidance Counsellor.

The responses to the questionnaires detailed in the above section indicate that the processes of planning and implementation of the guidance plan differ from school to school, due in no small measure to disparities in the resources available. In addition, some significant tensions emerge – especially in sustaining a collaborative approach to implementation and in reconciling the service and curriculum dimensions of guidance. The next section of this report outlines the responses of students in the four schools to questions about guidance provision.

Section 3: The student responses

The questionnaires

The schools administered the questionnaire for students between December 2007 and January 2008. The questionnaire had three parts – a section for Leaving Certificate students, one for those in third year, and a part for completion by students in first year, the focus of which was mainly on settling in to their new school. In total the schools returned 188 completed questionnaires from Leaving Certificate students, 226 from third years, and 225 completed by first years. Elm River had gathered responses from greater numbers of students than the other schools, significantly so in the case of third and first year students. In effect, the schools determined the response rates by administering the questionnaires during class time. Because of the disparities in the numbers returned from each school the aggregated responses are somewhat distorted in favour of the school/s with the greatest numbers of respondents.

What the first years said

The first years responded to the questionnaires at the end of their first term in post-primary school, or at the beginning of the second term. For this reason, the questions focused on their experiences of getting to know the school – how they found out about the school, and how in broad terms the school supported them in settling in. The **responses from the first year students** across the four schools revealed a picture of general satisfaction in their relationships with their schools. The first question offered a number of ways in which the students might have found out about their school and the students were asked to tick the statements they agreed with. Visits made by post-primary teachers to their primary schools and the provision of information sessions for incoming first years featured quite strongly in the ways in which students were informed.

Table 3: Starting secondary school – how did you find out about your new school?

Respondents ticked as many categories as they wished	Oak Ridge (n=55) %	Willow Garden (n=36) %	Elm River (n=97) %	Ash Grove (n=37) %	Total (n=225) %
From friends	49	61	73	65	64
Teachers from this school visited my primary school	87	58	42	41	56
I have an older brother/sister in this school	60	22	45	46	45
From my parents	49	58	56	43	52
School information sessions for first years	45	81	60	27	54
I found things out as I went along	29	14	59	49	43

The second question asked them to indicate supports that helped them to settle into school, whether they were familiar with school rules, had been given some advice about bullying and looking after their property, whether teachers were friendly and accessible for advice, and whether other students were friendly and supportive. The general picture was a positive one although there were variations from school to school. The responses of the first year students in Ash Grove would appear to indicate the presence of fewer supports of the kind available in the other schools, especially in terms of their awareness of 'a teacher they can talk to if something is worrying them'. Ash Grove is the smallest of the schools, with the fewest guidance hours, and also the one that indicated that its guidance provision centred most fully on meeting the needs of senior cycle students. That said, the school reported that it had allocated one class period per week for guidance for each class but noted that it would like to make more effective use of this time.

Table 4: Settling into school

Respondents ticked as many of the categories as they wished	Oak Ridge (n=55) %	Willow Garden (n=36) %	Elm River (n=97) %	Ash Grove (n=37) %	Total (n=225) %
I now know most of the school rules	93	89	93	70	88
If something is worrying me about school there is a teacher I can talk to	91	78	79	41	76
Mostly, the teachers are friendly or helpful	76	89	89	46	76
Mostly, the other students of my age are friendly	95	94	91	86	92
The school gives us advice about looking after our property	92	83	80	35	74
We have a class teacher (tutor) who takes a special interest in our class	80	72	93	68	82
The school gives us advice about bullying	95	92	90	62	87
Some of the older students in the school looked out for first years and helped us	73	61	68	59	67

The third question for first years asked them how much they knew about the subject choices they would have to make and how much they knew about those choices. Responses indicated somewhat sharper differences here with Willow Garden—the biggest school with two guidance counsellors—seeming to provide the most comprehensive programme of information for students. Students were free to tick any of the categories that they felt were true for them, and it was not uncommon to find students ticking the last two options as ‘true’ – showing that they both knew enough about their subject choices and that they would like to know more!

Table 5: Choosing subjects for Junior Certificate

Respondents 'ticked' as many of the categories as they wished	Oak Ridge (n=55) %	Willow Garden (n=36) %	Elm River (n=97) %	Ash Grove (n=37) %	Total (n=225) %
I know when I will have to choose subjects for Junior Certificate	38	100	56	78	62
The school will help me (has helped me) to make my choices	75	97	44	46	60
I know enough about my subject choices	65	97	63	76	71
I would like to know more about my subject choices	65	11	52	22	44

The student questionnaires were of necessity limited in scope and design to permit the schools to administer them and gather responses over a short time span. The questionnaire for first years focused on some elements of a guidance programme described in the curriculum framework under *Transitions* – the formal and informal supports the school provided in terms of knowledge about the new environment, awareness of external and internal supports, and support for decision-making. Responses from the students would indicate good levels of confidence in the supports provided by the schools, with Willow Garden, the largest of the schools appearing to provide the most comprehensive level of formal student supports for first years.

What the third years said

The questionnaire **for students in third year** asked the students about their views on what guidance in school 'should be mostly about', on their subject choices for Leaving Certificate, on the main ways in which they get advice and guidance, and on how frequently they had spoken to the guidance counsellor about school, careers or a personal issue over the previous three years. Table 6 indicates a wide level of agreement among these third year students that information and support about careers or further education was the highest priority for guidance in school.

Table 6: Guidance in school should be mostly about (third year students)

Respondents ticked the one that was most true for them	Oak Ridge (n=29) %	Willow Garden (n=44) %	Elm River (n=117) %	Ash Grove (n=36) %	Total (n=226) %
Information and support about subject choices	14	5	7	19	9
Support when you have school or personal problems	24	11	21	19	19
Information and support about careers or further education	52	64	50	53	54
Helping students to learn more effectively in school subjects	10	20	22	8	18

Responding to the question about subject choices for Leaving Certificate some 47% of the third year students indicated a desire for more information about their subject choices.

Table 7: Subject choices for Leaving Certificate

Respondents ticked the one that was most true for them	Oak Ridge (n=29) %	Willow Garden (n=44) %	Elm River (n=117) %	Ash Grove (n=36) %	Total (n=226) %
I know what choices I will have to make	34	23	10	19	17
I know enough about the subjects that I will have to choose between	21	23	15	11	17
I need more information about the subjects for Leaving Certificate	28	39	56	44	47
I don't think we have any choices to make	0	0	2	3	1
I know who to talk to if I need more information	17	16	16	22	17

The next question linked with the previous one in asking students to whom they would look for further information about their school subjects. The responses reported in Table 8 indicate considerable variation in the sources the students relied on for such information. The two schools in which students showed a comparatively low reliance

upon the guidance counsellor for this information were those that had indicated a specific focus in their guidance programmes on meeting the needs of senior cycle students. That said, all the student responses revealed that when it came to making decisions about subjects for Leaving Certificate the advice of their subject teachers and parents were of considerable importance. This pattern is confirmed in data collected from a national sample by ESRI.¹

Table 8: For more information about Leaving Certificate subjects

Respondents ticked as many of the categories as they wished	Oak Ridge (n=29) %	Willow Garden (n=44) %	Elm River (n=117) %	Ash Grove (n=36) %	Total (n=226) %
I ask the school guidance counsellor	93	89	26	19	46
I ask the teacher/s of the subject	38	61	73	72	66
I ask my friends	10	48	35	67	39
I ask my parents	34	51	55	56	52

Finally, the third year students were asked how often they had spoken to a guidance counsellor about a school, career or personal issue since first year. As seen in Table 9 below, a pattern similar to the previous responses emerged, although not as pronounced. The returns from Oak Ridge and Willow Garden—indicating that 75% and 77% of students had spoken purposefully to the guidance counsellor on one or more occasion—contrast sharply with those from the other two schools. In responding to School Questionnaire 1 Elm River had expressed satisfaction with the manner in which the cooperation between its guidance and SPHE departments was working while Ash Grove had noted that it might ‘do more’ with the dedicated guidance period, not replace it altogether. It is possible of course that neither the policy in Elm River of utilising its SPHE programme in junior cycle to meet guidance needs nor the practice in Ash Grove

¹ *Gearing Up for the Exam?*, Smith et al, ESRI, 2007 (p172)

of meeting guidance needs in junior cycle through a dedicated class period per week for class tutors had been understood by their third year students to have been guidance at all.

Table 9: Since first year I have spoken to the guidance counsellor about school, or careers, or a personal problem or issue

	Oak Ridge (n=29) %	Willow Garden (n=44) %	Elm River (n=117) %	Ash Grove (n=36) %	Total (n=226) %
Once	41	2	9	11	12
A few times	34	75	11	6	26
Often	10	18	3	3	7
Never	14	5	76	81	55

In summary then, the views of the third year students were that guidance should for the most part be about information on careers or further education. They suggested that they would like more information about subjects for Leaving Certificate but when asked on whom they would rely most fully for that information the responses differed considerably from school to school, especially in terms of the relative importance of the guidance counsellor and subject teacher as sources of information. Reflecting, perhaps, the extent to which schools are in a position to provide access to the guidance counsellor/s on a one-to-one basis, it is of note that some 55% of the third year students overall reported that they had never spoken to a guidance counsellor about school, career, or a personal problem or issue.

What the Leaving Certificate students said

The first question asked of **students in Leaving Certificate** was the same as on the third year questionnaire – what in their view the essential focus guidance in school should be. Responses, outlined in Table 10, showed similar priorities to those of the third years but with a more pronounced emphasis on the importance of support in the areas of careers and further education.

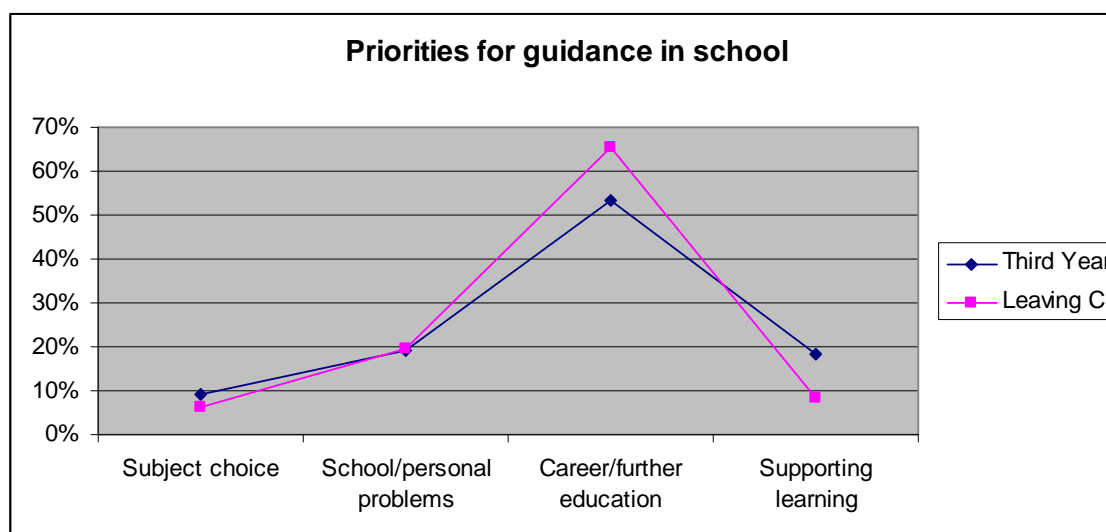
Table 10: Guidance in school should be mostly about (Leaving Certificate students)

Respondents ticked the one that was most true for them	Oak Ridge	Willow Garden	Elm River	Ash Grove	Total
---	-----------	---------------	-----------	-----------	-------

	(n=44) %	(n=38) %	(n=68) %	(n=38) %	(n=188) %
Information and support about subject choices	5	0	15	0	6
Support when you have school or personal problems	25	13	16	26	20
Information and support about careers or further education	66	79	56	68	65
Helping students to learn more effectively in school subjects	5	8	13	5	9

Figure 1 shows the comparison between the responses of third years and Leaving Certificate students. The pattern of priorities is similar, with the percentage indicating that help with school/personal problems remaining constant at 20% and the proportion for information and support about careers or further education rising from 54% for third years to 65% for Leaving Certificate students.

Fig 1: Priorities for guidance, third year and Leaving Certificate combined



Question 2 asked Leaving Certificate students how guidance was best organised. An aggregate of 61% of students favoured one-to-one sessions with the guidance counsellor as the best approach although the responses did range between 80% and 49% from school to school.

Table 11: The best way to organise guidance for school students is...

Respondents ticked the one that was most true for them	Oak Ridge (n=44) %	Willow Garden (n=38) %	Elm River (n=68) %	Ash Grove (n=38) %	Total (n=188) %
through information sessions for class groups	16	0	15	16	12
through one-to-one sessions with a guidance counsellor	80	68	49	55	61
by bringing outside support from experts into the school	2	11	10	21	11
by attending exhibitions/seminars outside of school	2	21	26	8	16

Question 3 for Leaving Certificate looked for the views of students regarding information about careers and/or further education. They were asked to tick three statements from a list of options, which were true for them. Their responses, included in Table 12, indicate a strong dependence on the guidance counsellor in this respect and also a considerable measure of confidence in their capacity to research the information for themselves.

Table 12: Finding information about careers and further education opportunities

Respondents prioritised three statements each	Oak Ridge (n=44) %	Willow Garden (n=38) %	Elm River (n=68) %	Ash Grove (n=38) %	Total (n=188) %
Support from a guidance counsellor is important	95	79	69	82	80
I can find out most of the information for myself	11	37	26	16	23
I rely mostly on my parents and/or friends	11	21	10	21	15
I look it up on the internet	68	74	31	63	55
I haven't thought much about it yet	2	0	4	11	4
Information by itself isn't enough, you need help in making decisions	23	53	44	61	44
The information I get in my school helps me to decide	50	37	51	42	46

The final question asked the students in Leaving Certificate to indicate, from a given selection, the sources of guidance in a school. Respondents were free to tick as many of the categories as they wished. Students from Willow Garden, the biggest of the schools with two guidance counsellors, showed awareness of the broadest range of sources through which guidance is provided.

Table 13: Guidance in the school is provided by...

Respondents ticked as many categories as they wished	Oak Ridge (n=44) %	Willow Garden (n=38) %	Elm River (n=68) %	Ash Grove (n=38) %	Total (n=188) %
The guidance counsellor	100	87	94	97	95
SPHE	11	13	12	0	10
Religion Class	5	50	13	16	19
All subjects	2	26	9	3	10
Teachers outside of class time	9	24	13	34	19
The school chaplain	0	18	19	21	15

The perspective of the majority of Leaving Certificate students on guidance provision in school was that it should prioritise information about careers and/or further education, a belief shared with students in third year, but articulated with greater conviction. In general, one-to-one consultation with the guidance counsellor was seen as the best means of access to guidance. A high level of appreciation of the guidance counsellor/s as pivotal in accessing information about careers and further education was balanced to some degree by the students' assertion that they felt confident to research information for themselves. Leaving Certificate students across the four schools were virtually unanimous in seeing the guidance counsellor as central to guidance provision in the school and awareness of alternative sources of guidance and support varied from school to school.

Section 4: Findings from the consultation

In responding to the questionnaires, the schools and students addressed a number of areas of priority in guidance planning and implementation. The schools' responses reflected their current provision and provided some reflection on the implications of using the NCCA draft curriculum framework. In reading this concluding section it should be borne in mind that the curriculum framework is neither a guidance programme nor plan and that its purpose is to provide a support in the development of a school's guidance plan. The responses from students, especially those in third year and Leaving Certificate, reflected what they considered to be important in guidance and how best they saw their own guidance needs being met. Given the small sample size involved, the findings of this element of the consultation are not in any way conclusive, nor do they purport to offer a definitive picture even within the four schools. What they do suggest is that there are some issues worthy of further discussion and consideration.

A collaborative approach to guidance provision

Responses to School Questionnaire 1 showed that, although guidance provision is currently organised differently from school to school, collaborative approaches have been adopted in all of the schools. These approaches range from the existence of a guidance planning team, to a formalised liaison between the guidance counsellor and the SPHE team, to the guidance counsellor acting as coordinator for the pastoral care team, to the allocation of one class period per week for guidance to the class tutors. The schools reported the benefits of a collaborative approach as affording opportunities to provide more flexible and comprehensive guidance programmes that could reach greater numbers of students, in effect to provide for *access to appropriate* guidance. Two of the schools identified the development of a guidance plan and the involvement of a greater number of staff members in the delivery of a guidance programme as priorities for future action. But each of the schools in turn drew attention to a barrier to progress in this direction – a perceived lack of resources and incentives for teachers that would enable them to commit to such collaborative ventures however desirable they might be.

The school guidance plan

In responding to questions on School Questionnaire 2, schools agreed on the need to have a planning group in place to identify the school's guidance needs and to draw up its guidance plan. Reflecting on the system changes needed to implement the plan in a more collaborative manner, schools identified a number of possibilities:

- formalising the roles of year heads and class tutors, including a payment structure for this work
- extending SPHE to senior cycle and the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers in this regard
- increasing the allocation of guidance hours to schools, thereby putting in place what one school termed *a better system of one-to-one counselling*
- establishing structures that would permit the expertise of parents and others in the local community to participate more meaningfully in meeting the guidance needs of students.

While the schools agreed that formalising and sustaining a team approach is most challenging, two of the schools drew particular attention to the positive impact of their SPHE programmes in helping to meet the guidance needs of students in junior cycle, the potential of which, especially in the area of Personal Guidance, is highlighted in the NCCA draft curriculum framework. Consequently, the introduction of SPHE in senior cycle could provide both a formal structure and a framework that would be supportive of significant elements of the guidance programme.

Implementing the guidance plan

There was agreement on the importance of the guidance counsellor/s having a significant coordination or liaison role in the implementation of the guidance plan. There was general agreement, although varying in detail, on the importance of reserving a number of functions to the guidance counsellor/s in the context of a team approach to guidance. Chief among those functions was the provision of one-to-one counselling for students in each of the areas of personal, educational or career counselling. A number of key perspectives on the nature and importance of counselling in the four schools emerged:

- it was seen as the *core work of guidance, or an essential element, or most important in solving [a] problem*

- it was seen as a gateway for students – a personal need, issue or problem can surface and be shared in the context of a counselling session that is ostensibly about career choice or further education
- it was seen as a service unfettered by conventional teacher/student relationships – it is confidential, *the guidance counsellor is seen by students as someone they can trust, someone that has no issues or conflict with them*
- it was seen as a responsive service, one for which set times and structures could not usefully be set down – *the guidance counsellor must be free to meet needs as and when they arise* – so, requiring that a distinction be made between service and curriculum aspects of a guidance programme.

Clearly, the schools value one-to-one counselling not only as a service that is responsive to the needs of the student in difficulty but as a mode of delivery that is part and parcel of the school's wider guidance programme. This raises a question of central importance to this part of the consultation – how might the framework support the school guidance plan in a manner that recognises the part played by one-to-one counselling? In the main the four schools do not provide an answer, but their responses do point to questions for further discussion:

Should the curriculum framework now be re-drafted to address the question of one-to-one counselling more explicitly?

Can the service dimension—which demands such a high degree of flexibility—be usefully reflected in the curriculum framework?

How is the service dimension of guidance currently reflected in a school's guidance plan?

The perspectives of the students

Three groups of students, totalling 639 in all, contributed to the consultation. Their participation was through one-off questionnaires agreed with and administered by their schools.

Students in **first year** reported good levels of support during their early engagement with their schools – visits to their primary schools, induction sessions, knowing who to talk to if there are problems, advice with property and bullying and advice on subject choices.

Some 54% of **third year** students expressed the view that information about careers and further education was what guidance should be about mostly, with 47% indicating that they would like ‘more information’ about the subjects they would be choosing for senior cycle. Two of the schools were markedly different in that the guidance counsellor was not the person to whom students in third year would most typically turn for information about subject choices. In those cases the subject teachers were seen as the more likely option. Given the views of the schools that one-to-one counselling was to a very large degree the core of a school’s guidance provision, it is not insignificant that when **third year** students were asked how often they had spoken to the guidance counsellor about school, or careers, or a personal problem or issue, 55% said that they had never done so. Nonetheless, some 20% of third year and Leaving Certificate students identified the availability of support ‘when you have school or personal problems’ as being most important in guidance in school.

Students in **Leaving Certificate** (65%) said that guidance in school should be mostly about careers and further education. Generally, they asserted that provision of one-to-one sessions with a guidance counsellor was the best way to organise guidance for school students but this was balanced in some instances by expressions of preference for sessions for class groups and the use of resources from outside the school. In matters relating to careers information and further education opportunities there was strong evidence of the centrality of the guidance counsellor/s to the processes of research and decision-making, but this was qualified somewhat by assertions that students could ‘find out most of the information’ or ‘look it up on the internet’.

Conclusion

Many responses in the consultation process have drawn attention to the role of counselling as a key feature of a school's guidance programme and have recommended that greater attention be given in the draft framework to this aspect of guidance, in particular to how schools might manage the balance between one-to-one counselling and other modes of delivery. This remains the most significant issue yet to be addressed.

(Post-primary Curriculum Framework for Guidance:
Final Report on Consultation, NCCA, 2007, p28)

The outcomes of the consultation with schools and students have mirrored many of the contributions to the initial phase of consultation, reiterating the importance of a comprehensive guidance programme and underscoring the pastoral nature of guidance, its impulse to be responsive to the needs of the individual student while implementing a programme of support at whole school level. That the provision of guidance in the school is a multi-faceted and complex task requiring considerable planning and significant levels of flexibility in implementation is acknowledged. The picture of the four schools that has emerged indicates that in those areas of planning and implementation choices have been made and priorities acted upon, in line with each school's audit of its needs and of the resources available to it. Each of the schools has said that it would like to do more, and some are keenly aware of where gaps in their provision exist. The schools have indicated that a team approach to the task offers opportunities to extend provision to meet the needs of greater numbers of students, but they have also reported that they are stretched to do what they currently do and that significant levels of resourcing would be required to make further progress in this regard.

Contributions from the schools and the students have stressed the importance of one-to-one counselling and its centrality to the school's guidance programme. The availability of one-to-one counselling has been presented in school submissions as an essential underpinning of the relationship between the guidance counsellor and the individual student, characterised as it is by confidentiality and trust. Equally, it has been presented as being of necessity separate from what might be termed strictly curricular provision because of its service nature and responsive character. In this regard it will be useful to consider the following:

- how a curriculum framework for guidance should function in a school planning context, so that it is supportive of the curricular dimensions of the guidance programme **and** the school's counselling service
- how pastoral and learning support structures—such as year head, class tutor structures—might be formalised to promote a more collaborative, whole-school dimension to the school's guidance programme
- how the introduction of SPHE in post-primary senior cycle might contribute to the wider availability of personal development programmes for all students in the school

Proposed next steps

This phase of consultation sought to determine the potential impact of the curriculum framework on guidance provision in the four schools. From the perspective of the schools, two central themes emerged from the consultation – the **significant resource implications** of making further progress in a collaborative approach to guidance, and the tension between the **curriculum and service dimensions** of any guidance programme. In terms of next steps it is clear that each of these areas will require further investigation and discussion. The schools have indicated unequivocally that, while much is currently done on a voluntary basis, they cannot consider themselves to be in a position to look for greater levels of voluntary participation by teachers in such whole-school collaboration without significantly increased resourcing.

From the perspective of the students, the responses of the first years reflected similar experiences of induction into their new schools and awareness of pastoral supports. Third year and Leaving Certificate students prioritised **information about careers and further education** and, even though they indicated that they could do much of the research for themselves, they asserted the **centrality of the guidance counsellor/s** to the processes of information gathering and decision making. **One-to-one counselling sessions**, in personal, educational and career contexts, was their clearly preferred option, even though they recognised other valuable sources of advice, most notably from subject teachers and their parents. Even though some 50% of third years reported that they had not spoken to a guidance counsellor about a school or personal problem since starting post-primary school, **the value to school and students alike of the**

school counselling service does not go unrecognised in the outcomes of this consultation. Indeed the responses from the schools are unanimous in their recognition of the importance of a flexible, responsive counselling service. The tension referred to earlier in this paragraph arises in good measure from this recognition and the awareness of the value and challenge of finding a meaningful and workable interface with the curricular elements of a guidance plan.

The draft curriculum framework for guidance was developed as a support for schools in planning the curricular elements of their guidance programmes. The schools participating in this aspect of the consultation have not questioned the value of the detail contained in the framework. On the contrary, they have recognised its value and the worth of the collaborative model of guidance provision that it implies. But their contributions and those of the students indicate that further consideration should be given to a small number of areas before the framework is finalised for issuing to the DES, along with advice related to its implementation in schools.

The development of advice on how the framework might be implemented in schools, including the **resource implications of implementing the curriculum framework** needs to be undertaken.

The relationship between the **service and curriculum elements** of guidance should be articulated more fully in the introductory material accompanying the framework, including exemplification of how the school's counselling service might be outlined in its guidance plan.

In recognition of the extent to which students prioritised **information about careers and further education**, the sections of the framework dealing with those areas should be reviewed with a view to their being expanded if necessary during the process of finalising the framework itself.

In conclusion, the NCCA wishes to acknowledge formally the contribution the four schools, in particular their principals, guidance staff and students, have made to this phase in the consultation on the draft framework for guidance.

APPENDIX 1

School Questionnaire 1

School Name		
Student numbers	Girls	Boys
Guidance Hours Available (Please tick ✓)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 full-time <input type="checkbox"/> 1 full-time <input type="checkbox"/> 1 part-time – number of hours () <input type="checkbox"/> 1 shared with other school/institution	
How Deployed (Please tick ✓)	<input type="checkbox"/> Counsellor/s involved in full-time provision of guidance and counselling <input type="checkbox"/> Counsellor/s engaged in some subject teaching – If so, please outline the nature/extent of the involvement	
How guidance provision in the school is currently managed (Please tick ✓ and comment briefly)	<input type="checkbox"/> Planned and implemented entirely by the Guidance Counsellor/s <u>Comment</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Planned and implemented by a Guidance Planning Team <u>Comment</u>	
Nature of provision in the school (Please tick ✓ what is closest to the reality in your school)	1. Guidance provision focuses equally on junior and senior cycle students <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree 2. Guidance focuses mostly on the needs of senior cycle students <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree	

	<p>3. Our guidance provision is mostly about Personal Guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p>4. Our guidance provision is mostly about Educational Guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p>5. Our guidance provision is mostly about Career Guidance <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly disagree</p> <p>6. We offer guidance to students through the following ways: <input type="checkbox"/> Timetabled whole class sessions <input type="checkbox"/> Occasional whole class or year group sessions <input type="checkbox"/> Small group guidance/counselling sessions <input type="checkbox"/> Planned one-to-one guidance/counselling sessions <input type="checkbox"/> One-to-one sessions in response to student request <input type="checkbox"/> Counselling sessions in times of crisis for individuals <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <u>Please comment</u></p>
--	---

	<p>The aspect/s of our guidance provision with which we are most happy</p>
--	--

	<p>The aspect/s of our guidance provision that we would most like to change</p>
--	---

APPENDIX 2

School Questionnaire 2

SCHOOL NAME: _____

Question 1

Using the NCCA Draft Curriculum Framework for Post Primary Guidance would ask schools to make changes to planning and implementation. This form allows you space to respond to those changes. Please indicate the structural changes you would need to make so as to ensure the following:

That guidance provision would reach all the students – junior cycle and senior cycle

That guidance provision would cover the three areas of personal, educational and career guidance adequately

That guidance provision would involve a team from the school community

That guidance provision would help parents to contribute, to support guidance for their children

That guidance would help students to manage their own learning and decision-

making

Question 2

How would implementing the framework represent a change in your current model of provision?

Question 3

A curriculum and a service – many submissions to the consultation see great difficulty in implementing the draft curriculum framework due to the nature of the work of guidance, that it combines curricular and service elements. In this space we ask you to record your reflections on this issue, bearing in mind the following:

- the role/significance of one-to-one counselling – the balance between it and other modes of provision
- the particular areas of responsibility they would see as being reserved to the guidance counsellor
- tension/s that might arise from the relationship between the service and curriculum dimensions of guidance

Question 4

In this section we ask you to make two lists

- a list of aspects of guidance provision that for your school are non-negotiable, these are the essentials that you feel cannot change
- a list of aspects of guidance provision that for your school are open to negotiation

The non-negotiable elements

Elements that are negotiable

Question 5

Any other observations

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire for students

SCHOOL NAME:

This questionnaire for students has **three sections**. Section 1 is for **students in first year**; Section 2 is for **students in third year** and Section 3 is for **Leaving Certificate students**.

SECTION 1 – for Students in First Year

Question 1 – Starting in secondary school

How did you find out about your new school? (Tick \surd as many of the boxes as you wish)

From friends

Teachers from this school visited my primary school

I have an older brother/sister in this school

From my parents

When we were starting in the school there were information sessions for first years

I found things out as I went along

Question 2 – Settling in to school

Please tick (\surd) the box **if you agree with the statement**

I now know most of the school rules

If something is worrying me about school there is a teacher I can talk to

Mostly, the teachers are friendly or helpful

Mostly, the other students of my age are friendly

The school gives us advice about looking after our property

We have a class teacher (tutor) who takes a special interest in our class

The school gives us advice about bullying

Some of the older students in the school looked out for first years and helped us

Question 3 – Choosing my school subjects

Please tick (✓) the box **if you agree with the statement**

I know when I will have to choose subjects for Junior Certificate

The school will help me (has helped me) to make my choices

I know enough about my subject choices

I would like to know more about my subject choices

SCHOOL NAME:

This questionnaire for students has **three sections**. Section 1 is for **students in first year**; Section 2 is for **students in third year** and Section 3 is for **Leaving Certificate students**.

SECTION 2 – for Students in Third Year

Question 1 – Guidance in school

Please read the following statements and **place a tick (✓) beside the one that is most true**

Guidance in a school should be mostly about

- information and support about subject choices
- support when you have school or personal problems
- information and support about careers or further education
- helping students to learn more effectively in school subjects

Question 2 – Subject choices for students in third year

Please read the following statements and **place a tick (✓) beside the one that is most true for you**

When it comes to making choices for my school subjects for Leaving Certificate

- I know what choices I will have to make
- I know enough about the subjects that I will have to choose between
- I need more information about the subjects for Leaving Certificate
- I don't think we have any choices to make
- I know who to talk to if I need more information

Question 3 – How I get information and guidance

Please read the following statements and tick (✓) the box if it is true for you. **You are free to tick as many boxes as you wish.**

If I need information about school subjects

- I ask the school guidance counsellor
- I ask the teacher/s of the subject
- I ask my friends
- I ask my parents

Question 4 – Guidance and me...

Please tick (✓) the option that is true for you

Since first year I have spoken to the guidance counsellor about school, or careers, or a personal problem or issue

Once

A few times

Often

Never

SCHOOL NAME:

This questionnaire for students has **three sections**. Section 1 is for **students in first year**; Section 2 is for **students in third year** and Section 3 is for **Leaving Certificate students**.

SECTION 3 – for Students in Leaving Certificate

Question 1 – Guidance in school

Please read the following statements and **place a tick (✓) beside the one that is most true**

Guidance in a school should be mostly about

- information and support about subject choices
- support when you have school or personal problems
- information and support about careers or further education
- helping students to learn more effectively in school subjects

Question 2 – How guidance is organised

Please read the following statements and **place a tick (✓) beside the one that is most true**

The best way to organise guidance for school students is

- through information sessions for class groups
- through one-to-one sessions with a guidance counsellor
- by bringing outside support from experts into the school
- by attending exhibitions/seminars outside of school

Question 3 – Career and further education options

Please read the following statements and **place a tick (✓) beside the THREE statements that are most true for you.**

When it comes to finding out information about careers and further education options

- Support from a guidance counsellor is important
- I can find out most of the information for myself
- I rely mostly on my parents and/or friends
- I look it up on the internet
- I haven't thought much about it yet
- Information by itself isn't enough, you need help in making decisions
- The information I get in my school helps me to decide

Question 4 – Guidance is...

Tick the box or boxes that are true for you.

Guidance in the school is provided by:

The guidance counsellor SPHE Religion Class All subjects

Teachers outside of class time The school chaplain