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Vocational Guidance Education in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe

European Commission

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN FULL-TIME COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Ireland

School year 2007/08

Education in Ireland is compulsory for children between the ages of six and sixteen. The primary school curriculum is an eight-year programme and most schools offer primary education to children from four years of age. Second level education is of five years' duration. An additional optional year – the Transition Year (TY) – is available in just over 70 % of second level schools and is taken when the first three years have been completed.

Typically, students transfer to second level education at twelve years of age. The junior cycle of secondary education is a three-year programme at the end of which students take a State examination, the Junior Certificate. During their last two years of second level education, students take one of three senior cycle programmes – the Established Leaving Certificate (LC), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Each of these programmes culminates in a State examination which leads to the award of a Leaving Certificate for each student. Places on higher or further education and training courses are allocated on the basis of students' performance in the Leaving Certificate examination.

Each school which offers the Transition Year designs its own programme according to a curriculum framework laid down by the Department of Education and Science. The year focuses on the development of general, technical and academic skills as well as on personal development. It provides opportunities for students to explore a range of personal interests and to engage in work experience and community work. In 2007/08, approximately 540 second level schools offered a Transition Year programme and over 27 000 young people participated in them.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998 states that schools must … ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices. To assist schools in meeting their obligations under the Act, the Department of Education and Science provides second level schools with an additional allocation of ex-quota hours for the provision of guidance. Each school's allocation is related to the size of its enrolment.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science has a statutory quality assurance obligation in relation to educational provision in schools. This is set out in section 13 of the Education Act 1998. The functions of an inspector include evaluating the quality of provision in schools and centres for education, supporting schools and teachers and advising the Minister. Inspectors of Guidance carry out inspections and advise the Minister on matters related to Guidance. Other legislation, such as the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, also has a direct bearing on the work of the Inspectorate.

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Department of Education and Science. Its main role is to support and develop guidance practice in all areas of education. In 2004, the NCGE undertook the management of the National Guidance Forum. The Forum was established as part of the programme of events of the Irish Presidency of the European Union in 2004. It was a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Forum had thirty-four members representing policy makers, guidance practitioners from education and labour market sectors, trainers of guidance counsellors, employers, trade unions, education managers, parents and consumers. The Forum launched its final report, Guidance for Life – An integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland, in October 2007 (see www.nationalguidanceforum.ie for the report).

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM

In Ireland, guidance in second level schools encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career/vocational guidance. The Education Act 1998 (section 21) requires schools to have a school plan. Each school is expected to develop a guidance plan as part of its whole school plan.

Almost all second level schools receive an allocation of ex-quota hours from the Department of Education and Science for the provision of guidance. The exceptions are certain private fee-paying schools with fewer than 350 students. The number of hours is allocated on the basis of the number of students enrolled and it ranges from eight hours per week to fifty-five hours per week. The guidance service in schools is delivered mainly by guidance counsellors.

Programmes with an additional vocational guidance component

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is designed to enhance the vocational dimension of the Leaving Certificate. The programme was introduced in 1994 in response to the challenge placed on Ireland's education system by a changing work and business environment. The programme combines the academic strengths of the established Leaving Certificate (LC) with a particular focus on self–directed learning, innovation and enterprise. This two-year programme was introduced as an expansion of existing provision to cater for the diversity of needs of senior cycle students.

The primary goal of the LCVP is to prepare young people for adult life by ensuring that they are educated in the broadest sense, with an ability to cope and thrive in an environment of rapid change. Participants are encouraged to develop skills and competencies fundamental to both academic and vocational success. The strong vocational focus of the LCVP is achieved by arranging Leaving Certificate subjects into Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs) and through the provision of additional courses of study in work preparation and enterprise known as the Link Modules. Guidance counsellors are involved in the delivery of these modules. They assist students in maximising their use of the opportunities provided and in exploring the range of progression options available. There are two Link Modules.

One Link Module is Preparation for the World of Work. This Link Module enables students to research and investigate local employment opportunities and develop job-seeking skills such as letter writing, CV presentation and interview techniques. They gain practical experience of the world of work or they may work-shadow a person in a career area that is of interest to them.

The other Link Module is Enterprise Education. Typically, students taking this are involved in organising visits to local business and community enterprises, in meeting and interviewing enterprising people on site and in the classroom, and in planning and undertaking activities designed to build self-confidence, creativity, initiative and to develop teamwork, communication and computer skills.

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is a two-year Leaving Certificate programme intended for students who wish to follow a practical programme with a strong vocational emphasis. In addition to work experience, students take a Vocational Preparation and Guidance module. This module, which is delivered by the school's guidance counsellor, facilitates the students' vocational development by raising their awareness of their interests and aptitudes, by developing their job search skills, by investigating career, education and training options and by devising personal career action paths.

One objective of Transition Year (TY) is the development of work-related skills. Students are provided with opportunities to develop more awareness of the world outside school. Many students in TY undertake work experience, work shadowing or set up mini-companies.

OTHER TYPES OF ACTIVITY/GUIDANCE SERVICES

Guidance services outside school

Youthreach is an initiative for young people in the 15-20 age group who have left school. It is funded by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment with the assistance of the European Social Fund, as part of the National Development Plans 2000-2006 and 2007-2013. The Department of Education and Science delivers the Youthreach Programme through centres for education managed by Vocational Education Committees (www.ivea.ie). The programme is also delivered in a network of forty-five Community Training Centres funded by FÁS (the Irish National Training and Employment Authority) and ten 'Justice Workshops' funded by FÁS (www.fas.ie) and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. A parallel programme in a culturally appropriate setting is delivered in the Senior Traveller Training Centres, of which there are thirty-three nationally (www.sttc.ie).

Adult learners who wish to access information about education courses can avail of the guidance services provided by the Adult Educational Guidance Initiative (AEGI). This service which is funded by the Department of Education and Science and managed by the NCGE was established in 2002. The AEGI now consists of thirty-eight guidance projects throughout the country which aim to provide a quality adult educational guidance service to participants in the Vocational Training.

Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) as well as literacy and other adult and community education programmes nationwide.

QUALIFICATIONS OF GUIDANCE STAFF

Guidance counsellors in second level schools are qualified teachers who have professional training in guidance at post-graduate level. Courses in guidance are provided by a number of the Irish universities. Some courses are full-time for one academic year and others are part-time over two years. The available recognised courses lead to a diploma in guidance at Level 7 or 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications, a master's degree in guidance or a master's degree in education which includes guidance as a major module component.

Most guidance counsellors are members of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC). The IGC is a professional body representing over 1 200 guidance practitioners in second level schools, third level colleges, adult guidance services, private practice and in other settings. The Department of Education and Science provides funding to the IGC for the continuing professional development of its members. Professional development activities are organised and delivered at local branch level and through an annual conference.

COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS, EMPLOYERS, PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

In 2001, a new three year initiative, the Guidance Enhancement Initiative (GEI), was introduced to build on existing provision of guidance in schools. Under this initiative, schools were invited to apply for inclusion in the GEI by submitting proposals on how they would address one, or more, of the following:

- developing and promoting links between schools and industry, local agencies and the community;
- increasing the uptake of science subjects in senior cycle;
- increasing retention rates/combating early school leaving.

Over 170 schools participated in the GEI. Each school received an allocation of ex-quota hours for guidance over and above its normal entitlement to implement its proposals. Schools continue to receive this additional allocation.

The Department of Education and Science issued guidelines to schools in 2005 to assist them in the provision of appropriate guidance to all their students. The guidelines stress the need for schools to address the provision of guidance in a whole-school context and to involve all relevant members of staff, parents, students and representatives of the local community, especially local business and other relevant agencies, in the development of the school's guidance plan.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

All schools are now equipped with broadband. Access to information and communication technology (ICT) for guidance purposes is considered an essential element of the guidance programme.

The Department of Education and Science funds Qualifax, a national learners' database of further and higher education and training courses. Qualifax is managed by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and it is being further developed to include information

about careers and training pathways for those seeking information about lifelong learning and training opportunities. The website (www.qualifax.ie) has links to other relevant websites and services.

Career Directions is a FÁS developed interactive multimedia program which provides adults and young people with comprehensive up-to-date information on approximately 700 careers. It also features a self-directed interest inventory which helps match individuals to potential suitable careers. It is available online (www.careerdirections.ie) or through a CD Rom version.

Internet references

Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance, Inspectorate, Department of Education and Science (published 2005) – available under Reports and Publications at http://www.education.ie

Review of Guidance in Second Level Schools, Inspectorate, Department of Education and Science (published 2006) – available under Reports and Publications at http://www.education.ie

Guidance for Life - An integrated Framework for Lifelong Guidance in Ireland, National Guidance Forum (published 2007) – available at http://www.nationalguidanceforum.ie