

**Worrying Times: An Investigation into the
Ramifications of the Removal of the Ex-quota
Allocation for Guidance Counselling in
Seven Post-Primary Schools in the East of Ireland**

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Declaration

The author hereby declares that this thesis is entirely his/her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in University of Limerick, or in any other institution.

Signature _____

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Glossary

ACCS	Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAO	Central Applications Office
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CPD	Continual Professional Development
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DES	Department of Education and Science (Up to 2010)
DES	Department of Education and Skills (2010 – Present)
DSCG	Directors of Studies in Guidance
ELGPN	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
IVEA	Irish Vocational Education Association
JMB	Joint Managerial Body
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NGF	National Guidance Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLC	Post-Leaving Certificate Course
PSI	Psychological Society of Ireland
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admission Service
UL	University of Limerick
WSA	Whole-school Approach

Abstract

The overarching aim of this research was to examine guidance counsellors' experiences of the removal of the ex-quota allocation for guidance counselling in the Irish post-primary sector post Budget 2012. As the researcher's original study (Connor, 2013) examined the same topic, this follow-on investigation specifically focussed on the two areas of professionalism and the role of guidance counsellors and the wellbeing of practitioners in current practice.

Similar to Connor (2013) an interpretivist paradigm underpins the current study. Semi-structured interviews were held with seven qualified practitioners in the East of Ireland to examine their perceptions and experiences of the allocation removal on their professional role, the services they provide to students, and the overall guidance profession.

The findings indicate that some confusion still exists within the Irish post-primary sector about the meaning of 'appropriate' guidance as articulated in the *Education Act, 1998*. In addition, there appears to be a significant gap between policies from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) relating to a Whole-School Approach (WSA) to guidance and current practice in post-primary schools. The findings also identify some uncertainty about the service provided by guidance counsellors in the school system. Finally, a lack of a coordinated response from the DES and Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) to help practitioners deal with the increased workload and pressures resulting from the Budget 2012 allocation removal is highlighted.

This research study can contribute to policy and practice within post-primary guidance counselling as it provides insights into the ramifications of the Budget 2012 allocation removal on the profession of guidance counselling, individual practitioners and services to pupils. The investigation concludes with a series of recommendations relating to the role of guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector since Budget 2012, stakeholder's attitudes towards post-primary guidance counselling and professional wellbeing amongst guidance counsellors in 2014.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the topic under investigation in this expanded research investigation. In addition, a justification for the research will be provided along with the aims, objectives and methodology of the study. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1 Context and Justification of the Research Study

The focus of this expanded research study was to examine the impact of the Budget 2012 removal of the ex-quota allocation for guidance counselling in the Irish post-primary sector from the perspective of practitioners working in the field. The findings that emerged from the researcher's initial investigation (Connor, 2013) elucidated a range of issues including:

1. A lack of clarity and specificity around the role, remit and responsibilities of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools.
2. Some reservations amongst practitioners about the inadequacy of the initial training for guidance counsellors, particularly the personal counselling element.
3. An extended workload requiring them to work beyond their timetabled twenty-two hours.
4. Evidence of the emergence of a two-tier system in post-primary guidance, where practitioners in fee-paying schools have greater resources to provide services than those in non fee-paying schools.
5. Confirmation that many guidance tasks such as administration work, attendance at open days as well as meetings with parents are being conducted after school hours, which is affecting practitioners' personal lives and wellbeing.

While the research topic is relatively similar, in this current study, there is a specific focus on the two areas of professionalism and the role of guidance counsellor, and wellbeing amongst practitioners in current practice. The main reason for focussing on these areas is the researcher's desire to discover practitioners' perceptions of their profession in light of the Budget 2012 allocation removal and also to ascertain how they are coping with the changed nature of their work.

As a result of the allocation removal, post-primary guidance services now compete with curricular subjects for time allocations in school timetables, to the detriment of the provision of a quality guidance service. The Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2012, 2013a, 2014) reiterates the whole-school nature of guidance counselling, but now appears to place less emphasis on the role of qualified guidance counsellors and more focus on care teams and the involvement of other staff members. Inevitably, some aspects of guidance services have been affected, with the Association of

Secondary Teachers Ireland survey (ASTI, 2013) identifying 71% of schools having reduced the time allocated for one-to-one personal counselling. The Institute of Guidance Counsellors identify a 51.4% (IGC, 2013) and 58.8% (IGC, 2014) reduction in the amount of time allocated for one-to-one personal counselling. Other findings from the investigations which took place after Budget 2012 indicate that:

1. Practitioners work between eleven and fifteen extra hours per week in addition to their allocated guidance hours (NCGE, 2013).
2. 10.5% of schools have unqualified staff working in guidance positions (IGC 2014).
3. Increasing numbers of schools are outsourcing personal counselling for students (IGC, 2013; 2014). Junior Cycle students are losing out on guidance classes (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013).
4. Increasing numbers of practitioners are performing dual roles of guidance counsellor and subject teacher (IGC, 2013, 2014).
5. 50% of practitioners have received increased levels of guidance-related subjects (JMB, 2013).

In the context of these changes, the issue of professionalism and personal wellbeing is paramount. This will be the focus of the current study.

1.1.1 Position of Researcher

The opportunity to carry out further investigation on this research topic appealed to the researcher as it is an important issue for somebody just entering the guidance profession. It also provided opportunities to examine two areas of interest in greater detail. In addition, the opportunity to once again listen to guidance counsellors' stories, which the researcher very much enjoyed in the previous investigation appealed greatly.

However, in interpretivist research, it is important that this researcher acknowledges his position and assumptions on the topic as well as his role in the research process (Cohen et al, 2007). His initial beliefs on the topic under investigation were that guidance counsellors were struggling to provide 'appropriate guidance', that this was having negative affects on their wellbeing and that there was significant confusion amongst some practitioners about the specific role of post-primary guidance counsellors. In order to keep a record of these initial opinions, the researcher kept a diary that also included further thoughts on the topic, details of interactions with participants as well as opinions on responses and comments from the participants (Thomas, 2009) and research supervisor throughout the research process.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Research Study

The overarching aim of this research study was to examine the impact of the Budget 2012 removal of the ex-quota allocation for post-primary guidance counselling by the DES, specifically in relation

to the two areas of professionalism and the role of guidance counsellor, and the wellbeing of practitioners in current practice.

The objectives of the research were to:

1. Review the relevant literature on policy, practice and research related to the provision of guidance counselling in the Irish post-primary sector, professionalism and practitioner wellbeing.
2. Collect the narratives of seven qualified guidance counsellors in the East of Ireland and establish how the allocation removal has impacted upon their professional role.
3. Observe how the localised management of post-primary guidance counselling services since the Budget 2012 allocation removal has developed.
4. Report on the research findings and make recommendations for future policy, practice and research relating to guidance counselling in the post-primary sector.

1.3 Research Methodology

Similar to the previous study (Connor, 2013) this research study examines the impact of the Budget 2012 allocation removal in depth through an interpretivist methodology. In order to obtain the relevant data, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with guidance counsellors who are working in the East of Ireland. From these interviews, participants' opinions and experiences relating to the restructuring of post-primary guidance counselling in the context of the nature of their current role since 2012 were obtained.

The qualitative data gathered during the investigation was analysed using the constant comparative method. This involved repeatedly reviewing and comparing each element of collected data (Thomas, 2009) through which topics and overarching themes emerged, were mapped out, compared and linked together.

At all times, the researcher was cognisant of the goodwill of the participants who volunteered to participate in the study. It was important that the research was conducted in an honest manner. Ethical principles, including institutional requirements for carrying out research in the University of Limerick, professional ethics outlined by both the IGC (2012) and the NCGE (2008) as well as the personal ethical beliefs of the researcher were adhered to.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

The structure of the dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the research study and identifies the research problem. It provides a justification for the topic, outlines the aim and objectives and as methodology, and provides an overview of the six chapters.

Chapter 2 provides an examination of the relevant literature to contextualise the research topic.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and research design underpinning the study.

Chapter 4 describes the data analysis strategy and presents the primary findings from the seven interviews conducted with guidance counsellors through a number of key themes.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings from the primary data gathered during the interviews in light of previous research, existing literature relating to guidance counselling in the post-primary sector as well as the findings from the researcher's previous investigation.

Chapter 6 concludes the research study by reporting the overall findings of the investigation and evaluating its strengths and limitations. It proposes a number of recommendations for future policy, practice and research and outlines the personal learning for the researcher.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research topic of the study. Chapter 2 examines the relevant literature relating to the research topic under investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

A literature review involves assessing and synthesising articles, journals, policies and writings which have been published on a research topic, as well as examining previous investigations into the topic (Thomas, 2009). A review of this nature assists investigators in narrowing their research focus and generating research questions (Robbins, 2008).

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first examines international definitions of lifelong guidance counselling and then focuses on descriptions in Ireland. This section also examines the benefits and outcomes of guidance counselling throughout the lifespan.

Section two examines Irish policies relating to post-primary guidance counselling.

Section three looks at professional practice and the impact of the allocation removal on practitioners' wellbeing.

2.1 Definitional Issues in Lifelong Guidance Counselling

At a European level, guidance is now considered through a lifelong lens which encompasses the growth and development of citizens across the lifespan (Council of European Union, 2008; CEDEFOP, 2009a; 2009b).

While European definitions and policies have developed, many states have two separate guidance systems – education and employment (ELGPN, 2011). There are differing policies, definitions and practices on national levels. For example, Greek law defines guidance as a whole-school activity which aims to help students identify their abilities and skills, match these with vocational and educational opportunities and make wise decisions. In terms of the labour market sector, Greek law states that the goals for guidance are to provide information on vocational opportunities, support people in making decisions regarding training opportunities and help clients develop job-seeking skills. While some countries have well-developed lifelong guidance systems others have only developed and promoted lifelong guidance in recent years. However, due to economic constraints of recent times, many countries have struggled to enact new initiatives and policies (CEDEFOP, 2009a).

Guidance in the UK is broadly defined as a range of processes that are designed to assist people in making informed decisions and choices on their educational, vocational and personal development (Watts and Kidd, 2000). They also state that while many think of guidance counselling as only one-to-one interviews, the truth is that it includes many more services for students.

From an Irish perspective, the National Guidance Forum (NGF) (2007a, p. 6) defines guidance counselling as a process that

facilitates people throughout their lives to manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social, and life choices so that they reach their full potential and contribute to the development of a better society.

(NGF, 2007a, p. 6)

This definition is quite similar to that in the ‘Canadian Blueprint’ as it refers to development across the lifespan. There are also similarities in terms of the educational, employment and training development aspects, however the Canadian model fails to mention improvements in society and people – it seems to have an economic focus. Denmark and Norway have clearer goals relating to the individual, such as increasing personal satisfaction, improving career decision-making and advancing personal development (OECD, 2004). While the NGF definition is not so specific, it does provide and focus on holistic development of a person, educationally, socially, vocationally and economically.

Policies on guidance counselling in Ireland have been influenced by the practice of both the American and UK systems, as well as the requirements of the *Education Act, 1998*. In fact, guidance counselling in the Irish post-primary sector is not dissimilar to school counselling in the USA. Counsellors in both countries are normally school staff who have other functions including career guidance duties (Hayes and Morgan, 2011). Ryan (1993) describes the Irish model as a compromise between the American model which has a personal counselling focus and the European model which has a narrower career guidance focus.

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”. The DES (2005) define guidance counselling as a range of learning experiences which assist students in developing self-management and decision-making skills that will help them throughout their lives. These learning experiences encompass three separate yet interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance.

It is important to recognise that the provisions and responsibilities for the counselling aspect of post-primary guidance services differ from country to country and even from one state to another in America. In the UK, many schools employ external agencies to provide counselling to students while schools often have professional school counsellors who deliver school counselling programmes in the USA (Hayes and Morgan, 2011).

According to CEDEFOP (2009), the “distinction, in the education sector, between guidance on the one hand and counselling on the other, has become an issue in some countries, including Ireland”. Additionally, the OECD (2002, p. 9) states that “no definition exists of what appropriate guidance should be”. There are also no suggestions about how to deliver ‘appropriate guidance’ within the Irish Education Act itself, nor is there any reference to personal counselling.

The importance of the counselling aspect of the post-primary guidance service in Ireland was highlighted in the DES (2005, p. 4) guidelines, stating that it is “a key part of the school guidance

programme, offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis”.

The NCGE (2004, p. 21) also identifies personal counselling as an important element of post-primary guidance counselling, stating that it “should be part of the support structure that a school provides to students” and that adequate time should be allocated for this function.

Despite the 2012 allocation removal, the DES (2012) reiterates that the provision of guidance counselling remains a statutory requirement for post-primary schools under the *Education Act 1998*. This represents a major reversal in terms of provision and policy on post-primary guidance counselling in Ireland and will be discussed in greater detail later.

The benefits and outcomes of lifelong guidance counselling will now be examined.

2.1.1 Benefits and Outcomes of Lifelong Guidance Counselling

According to the literature the specific benefits and outcomes of lifelong guidance counselling are economic (Bimrose, 2010; CEDEFOP, 2011; ELGPN, 2012; McGuinness et al, 2012), social (Bimrose, 2010; McCarthy, 2012; Mayston, 2002; OECD, 2004, Watts, 1999) and educational (McCarthy, 2012; OECD, 2004; Watts, 1999).

Economic Benefits and Outcomes

A key goal of lifelong guidance is to support equal access to, participation in, and outcomes of lifelong learning, in addition to labour market engagement (CEDEFOP, 2011).

An economic outcome of guidance counselling is the provision of knowledge and skills to clients that are required to make appropriate career transitions. This is “critical not only for an effectively functioning economy, but also for individual well-being” (Bimrose, 2010, p. 9). According to the ELGPN, this involves enabling clients to:

manage and plan their learning and work pathways in accordance with their life goals, relating their competences and interests to education, training and labour market opportunities and to self-employment.

(ELGPN, 2012, p. 14)

Hughes et al (2002) outline several economic benefits of guidance counselling, which include:

1. Motivation and attitudinal change in individuals, including improved levels of self-confidence, enhanced motivation to seek employment and increased interest in education and training.
2. Increased levels of adult participation in further education and training.
3. Increased levels of student retention and decreased numbers of drop-outs.
4. Increased probability of adult participation in continuing education and training.

5. 'Indirect' benefits for employees, including improved morale and attitudinal change, rather than productivity gains, from internal career discussions.
6. Economic benefits through helping to decrease unemployment in three ways:
 - a. Re-stimulating discouraged workers and long-term unemployed to become active in the labour market.
 - b. Improving alignment between the demand for and supply of labour.
 - c. Increasing the efficiency of job searching so that vacancies can be filled quicker.

One of the primary aims for developing policies on lifelong learning has been to provide workforces with flexible skills. Another objective of such policies is to react to aging demographics of workforces and low numbers entering employment (McGuinness et al, 2012). Additionally, McCarthy (2012) states that guidance counselling can contribute towards increased labour market efficiency by identifying better fits between the interests, skills and qualifications of young people.

Social Benefits and Outcomes

Bimrose (2010) states that if children are:

properly supported in making their early career decisions, it is more likely that they will recognise the value of continuous learning, make progress towards realising their full potential and lead more fulfilling lives.

(Bimrose, 2010, p. 9)

The OECD (2004) states that guidance counselling can help promote social inclusion by supporting the integration of ethnic minorities, immigrants and socially disadvantaged people into both education and the workforce. McCarthy (2012, p. 4) also proposes that social equity goals can be achieved through guidance counselling as it can “ensure that education and employment opportunities are distributed equitably and that people make maximum use of their talents regardless of their gender, social background or ethnic origin”. For example, peripheral sectors of society can obtain improved access and direction on how to utilise educational and labour market data.

Guidance focuses on encouraging citizens to participate in learning and employment and so can be seen as a factor in preventing marginalised individuals from becoming socially excluded. Guidance can also alleviate the situation of those who have become excluded by helping them to rejoin employment, education or training (Watts, 1999).

According to Mayston (2002), effective career guidance can generate several 'wider' social benefits which could be included in a cost-benefit analysis of guidance services. These “wider” benefits include increased tax yields for governments, reduced unemployment levels, reduced social welfare and healthcare costs, as well as reduced frequency and costs in crime.

Educational Benefits and Outcomes

The OECD (2004) states that guidance counselling can help students to:

1. Develop knowledge around decision-making, the world of work, transitions as well as the concept of lifelong learning and development. McCarthy (2012) reiterates this point that increased levels of school achievement and course completion rates may lead to improved course selection and completion levels for third level students.
2. Improve levels of basic skills, which is considered important in lifelong learning strategies.
3. Help reduce dropout rates and improve graduation rates.
4. Improve links between the education and labour markets.

The educational benefits of guidance include increased commitment levels among students through more suitable course selection, which can help reduce drop-out and improve attainment levels (Watts, 1999). At post-primary level, attendance and attainment levels of students who had worked with guidance counsellors were found to have risen post-counselling while exclusion rates decreased. Additionally, student-teacher relationships improved, an indirect consequence of counselling, which increased the eagerness of students to participate in learning (Phillips and Smith, 2011).

Guidance counselling has a key role to play in the education and training of those outside the workforce. The development of literacy levels, post-primary and further education opportunities can be addressed through provision of information and courses for those wishing to return to education (Ireland, 2007).

In terms of professional education and training, guidance can contribute towards improved retention of employees in courses and jobs. Consequently, employees can improve their efficiency and effectiveness, resulting in greater productivity and retention rates for employers (Watts, 1999).

2.2 Irish Policy Developments in Guidance Counselling in the Post-Primary Sector

While some accession states have yet to acknowledge the importance and role of guidance counselling, others such as Denmark, Iceland and Norway have identified guidance as a legal right (CEDEFOP, 2009a). In Ireland, guidance counselling earned legitimacy through the *Education Act, 1998*, Section 9(c) which, as mentioned previously, states schools must “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices”.

The DES (2005, p. 4) sought to set out the implications of the *Education Act, 1998* on the provision of guidance counselling in post-primary schools. It stated that guidance counselling “encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” which ultimately assist students “to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives”. The DES continues on to say that the aims of guidance counselling are to help students:

develop an awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities; to explore possibilities and opportunities; to grow in independence and to take responsibility for themselves.

(DES, 2005, p. 5)

Gysbers and Norman (2001) believe that guidance counselling in the twenty-first century should entail comprehensive school programmes serving all students and their parents, which are run by active school counsellors, who are placed at the centre of education in schools. Consequently, guidance counselling becomes an integral part of schools, where practitioners have structures, time, and resources to use their expertise and implement a whole-school approach (WSA) to guidance.

The NCGE (2004, p.16) state that the guidance plan is “a structured document that describes the school guidance programme and specifies how the guidance needs of students are to be addressed”. They continue on to state that guidance is both a whole-school issue as well as an area of expertise within education. While guidance counsellors are trained specialists who have a professional responsibility in planning and delivering guidance services, others have roles to play too. These include school management, subject teachers, parents, students and external agencies.

The DES (2005) also emphasise the necessity for whole-school guidance planning as part of WSA to guidance and identifies students, parents, subject teachers and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) as crucial partners in the planning, development and delivery of the plan. Although others are involved in the planning of the whole-school plan, the guidance counsellor still has the primary responsibility for delivering the guidance counselling service within the school.

The NCGE (2004) state that the role of the guidance counsellor involves several tasks, including personal counselling of students, support to parents, teachers and Principals, psychometric assessment for students, provision of information to students which may help their personal, educational or career development, classroom-based guidance activities, organisation of workplace learning, referrals to outside agencies, as well as training and continuous professional development (CPD) in the guidance discipline.

The IGC (2007b) state that the role of guidance counsellors comprises seven key areas, including personal, educational and vocational guidance throughout the lifespan, labour market education, equality and diversity, management and delivery of guidance service programmes, information and resource management, counselling skills as well as ethical principles and professional practice.

The NGF (2007a) propose five key areas of competencies for guidance counsellors in Ireland, including vocational, educational and personal/social guidance throughout the lifespan, labour market education and training, counselling, information and resource management as well as professional practice. It was intended that these five areas of competencies would provide methods for recognising the knowledge, skills and experience of practitioners. They would also allow guidance roles to be recognised within national and international qualifications frameworks, as well as guiding

postgraduate training providers on skills, knowledge and course content required to carry out guidance roles.

In order to provide clarity on the specific role of guidance counsellors in the Irish post-primary sector, the NCCA (2007) put forward a published the '*Draft Curriculum Framework for Guidance in Post-Primary Education*'. This document was to provide direction and assistance for guidance counsellors, school principals, boards of management and others involved in the provision of guidance counselling. It restated the three areas of personal, educational and vocational, recognised the importance of counselling within the guidance service and highlighted the links between guidance and curricular subjects and programmes (Hayes and Morgan, 2011). However, the IGC (2007a) stated that there was confusion in the document about the counselling aspect of guidance. They went on to state (ibid, p. 8) that "there is a need to recognise the limitations of this model when applied to service interventions which are additional to and different from "curricular experiences" and that a service plus curriculum model should be explored.

This draft curriculum seemed to differ from developments in the US, where the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act Amendments of 1998 removed the concept of an organised program based on a curriculum and instead focused only on providing individuals with information. This was a dramatic change in purpose for guidance and counselling which narrowed its purpose considerably (Gysbers and Norman, 2001).

The IGC (2008) continued to place considerable importance on the distinction between the professional counselling and curricular elements of the service which practitioners provide. It states that "the provision of personal counselling is a guidance intervention that cannot fit into a curricular structure in any meaningful way" (ibid, p. 7). While the IGC places such emphasis on this differentiation, it seems that the DES does not. They failed to specifically mention the counselling aspect of practitioners' work in their Inspectorate Report (DES, 2009) which examined guidance counselling in post-primary schools.

As stated above, the DES (2012) disseminated Circular 0009/2012 in light of the Budget 2012 announcement to remove the ex-quota allocation. This stated that guidance remained a statutory requirement for schools under the *Education Act, 1998* and that Principals must ensure practitioners have time for 1:1 personal counselling with students but offered no suggestions on how they should allocate hours for guidance counselling. The DES emphasises that previous literature and circulars relating to guidance were disseminated in times when ex-quota allocations existed and should be read in this light but that guidance counsellors must be qualified post-primary teachers who hold a recognised postgraduate qualification in guidance.

Despite these assertions, the DES worryingly provides little direction on how Principals or practitioners should plan or run a functioning guidance service with less time available. While it may

allow opportunities to tailor guidance counselling services to match individual school's needs, it also facilitates further inconsistencies in the levels of service offered to students, such as practitioners in community/comprehensive schools who spend more time on personal counselling than on academic guidance, whereas the opposite is true in voluntary and vocational schools (McCoy et al, 2006).

In an attempt to assist and provide direction to Principals, management bodies and practitioners on how to cope with delivery of a statutory guidance counselling service in light of the allocation removal, the ACCS et al (2012) provided a possible framework. This suggested the number of hours that could be allocated in schools for small group sessions and 1:1 counselling but also reiterated the DES (2005) directive that students receiving personal counselling over a protracted period be referred to external services. This seems to emphasise that guidance counsellors simply provide emergency counselling, as opposed to working with students they know over a period of time.

The framework also emphasises the importance of guidance counsellors' roles in testing as well as presenting examples of online resources which may be used to improve the efficiency of practitioners. It also reiterates the whole-school nature of guidance planning and delivery.

The DES launched three new policies, *Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion in Post Primary Schools*, (2013a), *Action Plan on Bullying* (2013b) and *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools*, (2014) which recognise the stress that young people and those who provide support services to them are under. While these policies once again reiterate the vital role of guidance counsellors, the Directors of Studies in Guidance Counselling (2013, p.2) question the "commitment of the DES to support such vital endeavours".

Similar government policies of cutting back on important public services have had negative effects in other countries. In the UK, cutbacks in the provision of career guidance at post-primary level have led to face-to-face guidance being replaced with online and telephone-based services. This has impacted negatively on the provision of career guidance to young people. Research findings on this issue state that schools require assistance to increase the scope of their career guidance counselling (Evans and Rallings, 2013), not reduce their service offerings, especially in times when career opportunities are limited for young people.

Since the 2012 allocation removal, a number of surveys have been conducted from the perspective of management and practitioners, to assess the impact of the allocation removal on guidance counselling. The IGC (2013) published findings (*fig. 2.1*) of its initial national survey of practitioners, which indicated several interesting findings:

Fig. 2.1: Findings of IGC (2013) Audit of Guidance & Counselling Practice

1.	21.4% reduction in overall guidance counselling services.
2.	Significant variations among school types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational/Community schools lost 30.6%. • Voluntary Secondary schools lost 21.2%. • Community/Comprehensive schools lost 20%. • Colleges of Further Education 15.6%. • Fee-Paying schools 12.1%
3.	51.4% reduction in the time allocated for 1:1 counselling.
4.	19.8% increase in timetabled classroom delivery of guidance.
5.	Breakdown of practitioners' weekly hours had altered significantly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28.3% of time was spent on classroom delivery of guidance. • 29.3% spent on 1:1 counselling. • 6.5% on group work. • 35.9% on other work.
6.	Breakdown of practitioners' classroom delivery: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 53.2% represented classroom guidance. • 28.9% subject teaching. • 12% teaching SPHE • 5.9% represents other teaching.

(Source: IGC, 2013)

The response rates to the Audit were 36.4% for Phase 1 and 37.9% for Phase 2. Of the schools that responded to Phase 2, 88.2% had already responded to Phase 1. This is a rather low response rate and while providing interesting insights into the changing nature of guidance counselling after 2012, cannot be seen to portray an accurate reflection of over 1000 practitioners throughout the country. The question of why so few practitioners responded must be asked. Were they afraid to say what was happening in their schools? Did some practitioners, such as those in fee-paying schools, feel somewhat privileged and sheltered from the allocation removal and not want to publicly state this?

The JMB (2012), which represents the management of voluntary post-primary schools, surveyed their members when the effects of the allocation removal were beginning to emerge. The findings indicate that Principals adapted various difficult measures in order to maintain guidance counselling services in their schools. These included assigning the guidance counsellor curricular subjects,

removing guidance counselling services from some year groups, amalgamating higher and ordinary level classes and even reducing subject choice.

The Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI) survey (2013) of schools finds that 10% of schools have introduced out-of-school counselling services. The survey also indicates that 71% of schools have reduced the time allocated for one-to-one personal counselling while 30% of schools have sacrificed elements of career guidance to save time for one-to-one personal counselling.

The NCGE (2013) review of guidance services indicates that:

1. The average allocation decreased from 24 hours in 2011-12 to 17.8 hours in 2012-13.
2. Similar to the IGC (2013) findings, the level of change in allocation by school type to be 25% in voluntary secondary schools, 28% in vocational schools and 24% in community/comprehensive schools.
3. In terms of staffing levels, 48.6% of respondents had one staff member providing guidance at Phase I, however 61.8% had one at Phase II. Additionally, 40.3% of schools had two guidance staff at Phase I, however only 30.6% had two at Phase II.
4. In relation to student contact hours, the percentage of time devoted to Junior Cycle guidance was significantly less at Phase II, while the percentage devoted to Senior Cycle was considerably more. This could be a result of schools prioritising Senior Cycle due to fewer resources.

The second national audit carried out by the IGC (2014) indicates that there has been on average a 23.7% reduction in the time allocated to guidance and counselling services, a decrease of a further 2.9% on the 2013 figure. Respondents also indicated that there had been 12.8% increase in timetabled classroom guidance as well as a disturbing 58.8% reduction in one-to-one career and personal counselling. Another worrying trend is the apparent use of unqualified staff (8.1% of respondent schools) delivering guidance counselling in some schools. Of even greater concern is the use of external agencies to provide guidance counselling to students. Once again, however, the response rate for this audit was quite low at 37.9%, therefore calling into the question the generalisability of the study.

These investigations were quantitative in nature and provided statistical data on the changes taking place in post-primary guidance counselling. While response rates were acceptable for posted questionnaires (36.4% for Phase 1 and 37.9% for Phase 2 of IGC 2013; 39% for NCGE 2013; 37.9% for IGC 2014), they were still rather low, however they did provide an indication of the changed nature of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector. They did not, however, examine practitioners' opinions and experiences of the allocation removal in depth, which quantitative studies would facilitate.

2.3 Professionalism and Wellbeing in Guidance Counselling

This section examines professional practice and the impact of the allocation removal on practitioners' wellbeing.

2.3.1 Defining Professionalism

There is much confusion around the definition and meaning of professionalism (Evans, 2008). According to Swisher and Page (2005) professionalism refers to internal beliefs about attitudes, values, obligations, attributes, interactions, and role behaviour. It can be considered the set of qualities an occupation or its members possess, claim or ought to possess (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996). Many people have sets of traits, characteristics, behaviours and qualities which they hold in high esteem and feel exemplify professionalism, and some of these attain general consensus (Rowley et al, 2000). Regardless of individual definitions, the meaning of professionalism can be noticed and explained by its absence (Phelps, 2006).

In relation to education, professionalism was historically focussed on delivery of curricula and achievement of results (Toh et al, 1996). Phelps (2006) outlines professionalism in teaching through three criteria:

1. Responsibility: this encompasses delivery of curricula, classroom management, ensuring safety and wellbeing of students, accurate record keeping and communicating with parents.
2. Respect: showing integrity and respect in dealings with all stakeholders in education.
3. Risk-taking: taking risks, asking questions, challenging status-quo's and broadening horizons of students.

Phelps (2006) also contends that professionalism is determined by the sets of values and beliefs which teachers have internalised and continues on to state that teachers should engage in reflection and dialogue on their professionalism.

2.3.2 Managing Wellbeing in Guidance Counselling

Generally speaking, wellbeing refers to how a person is doing; how is their state of mind? According to Ryan and Deci, (2001, p. 142), "*well-being refers to optimal psychological functioning and experience*". The holistic wellbeing of an individual is comprised of many facets including emotional health, psychological health and occupational contentment (Ménard and Brunet, 2012).

Occupational stress, which results from a discrepancy between job demands and job control, plays a significant role in influencing an individual's wellbeing (Rosenthal and Alter, 2012). There are many factors, or stressors which can affect workers, including workload, workplace conflict,

increased work intensity, leadership style, organisational downsizing, restructuring and work-family conflict (Burke, 2010).

Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) identify seven sources of burnout for workers (*fig. 2.2*), which they believe are found within the organisation and not the individual.

Fig. 2.2: Seven Sources of Burnout

<u>Burnout Creation</u>		<u>Burnout Prevention</u>
Work overload	vs.	Sustainable workload
Lack of control	vs.	Feelings of choice and control
Insufficient reward	vs.	Recognition and reward
Breakdown of community	vs.	Sense of community
Unfairness	vs.	Fairness, respect and justice
Significant value conflicts	vs.	Meaningful, valued work
Incongruence between person and job	vs.	High job-person fit

(Source: Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011:150)

Kyriacou (2001) identifies ten key stressors for teachers including self-esteem and status, role conflict and ambiguity, dealings with colleagues, teaching unmotivated pupils, maintaining discipline, workload and time pressures, coping with change, evaluation by others, administration and management as well as poor working conditions.

It is clear that there are many factors which can cause work-related stress. When we consider the role of guidance counsellors in light of the 2012 allocation removal, some of the above factors could be considered as rather pertinent in terms of stressors for practitioners. These factors include self-esteem and status, role conflict and ambiguity, dealings with colleagues and time pressures (Kyriacou, 2001); workload, increased work intensity and organisational restructuring (Burke, 2010); lack of control, insufficient reward and breakdown of community (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

Gallie (2013) also asserts that organisational change can be a stressor for many workers but that workers who experience the highest levels of pressure are those that experience major decreases in staffing numbers. Additionally, he identifies the combination of high demand and low control as a problematic pattern and potential stressor for workers. When we consider the allocation removal, lack of control over their work and increased demand for the service (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013a; 2014; JMB, 2012), it is clear that these factors are extremely applicable to guidance counsellors and that they could indeed be struggling with stress.

Another potential source of stress for guidance counsellors is the nature of the work. It is considered high-touch work, which means “highly skilled professional attachment, involvement, and separation over and over again with one person after another” (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011, p.106). The difficulty of the work lies in the building and maintain of relationships, which may require significant energy from the practitioner (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011). These relationships include teacher-teacher, teacher-principal and teacher-student affairs (Day and Gu, 2014).

Several studies have been published on issues relating to self-care, fatigue and burn-out of counsellors. Rye & Spark (1999) note that school counsellors are in the front line for dealing with youth suicide and identified three factors as being crucial for continuing effective professional functioning: training and practice standards, support resources and self-care. One potential technique for developing self-care would be for practitioners to engage in resiliency training, which involves stress management techniques, development of self-worth as well as a focus on personal development (Skovholt and Rønnestad, 2003)

The importance of peer support and a good network to utilise this support is also very important for self-care among practitioners. By engaging in such networks and relationships, guidance counsellors may not only broaden their knowledge of the work they do, but also develop meaningful relationships which are important to have outside of work (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

Yalom (2011) believes that working with clients is a demanding process and practitioners should engage in personal therapy to gain a fuller appreciation of the process and to focus on themselves. Reid (2010) highlights the importance of dedicated time to de-stress, under the guidance of experienced and trained supervisors. This is considered a responsibility of guidance counsellors in the Irish post-primary sector (Hayes and Morgan, 2011) and CPD is provided for practicing guidance counsellors (Monaghan Education Centre, 2012).

Reid (2010) states that self-care is the primary aim of supervision which can be developed through focussing on three key areas: management of stress from working with difficult situations and backgrounds, emotional welfare management to avoid exhaustion and remain engaged as well as setting of professional boundaries to navigate difficult situations.

Finally, activities, interests and leisure pursuits can provide diversions from occupational stress (Hearne, 2012) and a way to reconnect with one’s self and others (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011).

2.4 Summary of Literature

Provision of guidance counselling in post-primary schools is a statutory requirement under the *Irish Education Act* (1998). Irish policies on guidance counselling have been influenced by the

requirements of this Act, as well as the practice of both the American and UK systems. While no set curriculum exists for the provision of guidance counselling, the DES (2005) articulates three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance which are essential components of guidance programmes in post-primary schools. The importance of the counselling aspect of the overall guidance service in Ireland was highlighted by the DES (2005), NCGE (2004) and IGC (2007b), while policy on guidance counselling as a whole has developed markedly since 2004.

There are several outcomes from guidance counselling, including social and equity benefits (OECD, 2004; McCarthy, 2012), educational outcomes (Watts, 1999; OECD, 2004) and economic outcomes (Hughes et al, 2002; Bimrose, 2010; CEDEFOP, 2011; McCarthy, 2012; ELGPN, 2012 and McGuinness et al, 2012). Despite this, a decision was made to remove the allocation for post-primary guidance counselling as part of Budget 2012.

Quantitative studies on the affects of the removal of the allocation (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013) have been carried out, indicating average reductions between 21.4% and 23.7% in post-primary guidance services (IGC, 2013a and 2014), increases in the numbers of unqualified staff performing guidance duties (IGC, 2014), as well as less time being dedicated to guidance at Junior Cycle (NCGE, 2013). The researcher intends to carry out qualitative research on the issue. The aim is to ascertain what the changed provision means to guidance counsellors in terms of the work they do, their views on their professional role and how they are managing their wellbeing since the change.

While there is much confusion and a lack of consensus around the true definition and meaning of professionalism (Evans, 2008), it seems that it consists of a set of values and attitudes which people convey. Additionally, practitioner wellbeing is an important issue at present and one which can be affected by stress. Practitioners must be mindful of this phenomenon and take relevant steps to minimise it during this time of change for post-primary guidance counselling.

By carrying out this investigation, the researcher intends to examine the above issues in greater detail. They will form the basis of the research questions which will guide the fieldwork and interpretation of the current situation in professional practice.

2.5 Conclusion

This concludes the literature review section. Chapter 3 will examine the methodology of this research, including the paradigm selection, the data collection method selected, as well as issues surrounding validity, reliability, generalisability and ethics.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology which underpinned the study. It identifies the primary and secondary research questions of the study, examines and compares research paradigms, as well as offering a justification for the chosen paradigm of this study. The target population of the research and the sampling method used are discussed. A critical analysis and rationale for the data collection method used in the research as well a brief overview of the interview schedule are also provided. Issues relating to validity, reliability and objectivity are discussed, data analysis methods are examined while finally, ethical issues are also addressed.

3.1 Identification of Research Questions

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this expanded research study was to examine the impact of the 2012 allocation removal for guidance counselling in post-primary schools from the perspective of guidance counsellors working in the field. The previous research questions focussed on practitioners' opinions and experiences of the allocation removal, however this time the focus of the research was on the practitioners themselves. Research questions addressed their thoughts and feelings on the changed nature of their work role, potential stresses, coping strategies and the profession of guidance counselling in Ireland.

Every research dissertation should have an overarching research question. Arriving at this primary research question can be an intellectual and writing challenge which can only be achieved after relevant literature has been examined and summarised (Hogan et al, 2009).

In exploring the research problem and literature at hand, the researcher identified the primary and secondary research questions as follows.

The primary research question asked "*How are guidance counsellors managing their workload since the allocation removal in Budget 2012?*" This question sought to investigate the level of workload that practitioners are experiencing at post-primary level, the conditions they are working under and how this change has affected them both personally and professionally.

The secondary research questions of the study were:

1. What are guidance counsellors' views of guidance counselling as a profession?
2. Are they satisfied with the definition and clarity of the role of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools?
3. What, if any, forms of stress are practitioners feeling since the 2012 allocation removal?
4. How are practitioners managing their personal well-being since the allocation removal?

Once formulated, the researcher had to consider a suitable paradigm to answer these research questions.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a belief system that shapes how a person views an issue, topic and the world as a whole. A paradigm can be considered a school of thought. Various paradigms exist for most topics, including economics, religion and research (Robbins, 2008). The expression originates from the Greek word *paradeigma*. In terms of research, a paradigm refers to the manner in which we carry out investigations and use the data we uncover to explain phenomena (Thomas, 2009). This is characterised by:

1. The researcher's ontology – how they view *what* they are looking at.
2. The researcher's epistemology – *how* they look at things.
3. Methodology – how the researcher thinks they should go about finding out.

Essentially, these factors explain how researchers view knowledge, how they view themselves in relation to this knowledge and which methods of collection they find appropriate to obtain the knowledge (Thomas, 2009).

3.2.1 Paradigm Selection

As stated in the two previous chapters, a number of quantitative surveys were administered by the ASTI (2013), IGC (2013, 2014), JMB (2012) and NCGE (2013) on the topic of the Budget 2012 allocation removal in the post-primary sector. These investigations provided quantitative statistical data on the changing nature of post-primary guidance counselling in the recent years. However they did not examine practitioners' opinions and experiences of the allocation removal in-depth, which qualitative studies, such as that proposed by the researcher, would facilitate.

Therefore, the paradigm underpinning this research study was that of interpretivism. The aim of this research study was to examine the impact of the 2012 allocation removal from the perspective of guidance counsellors working in the field, in a qualitative manner. The researcher believes that a gap for such interpretative research exists as no qualitative data had been published on the topic thus far.

It was hoped that an investigation of this nature could help to tell the stories of practitioners, as their individual thoughts, actions and multiple realities are different (Thomas, 2009). Thick descriptions would be developed through interaction, discussion and observation (Thomas, 2009), thereby providing rich insights and detailed accounts of their experiences of the allocation removal in the post-primary sector.

3.2.2 The Debate on Positivism versus Interpretivism

Positivism is historically associated with the French philosopher Auguste Comte who believed that understanding behaviour was best achieved through observation, reasoning and explanation. According to Cohen et al (2007) those who supported this view were known as positivists and believed that:

1. Every event has a cause and is determined by other factors.
2. Comprehension of the world can only be achieved through direct observation.
3. Most knowledge can only be derived from experience.
4. Phenomena should be quantitatively measured in order to be understood.
5. Human behaviour is governed by universal laws.
6. Phenomena and events can be generalised to the world at large (Cohen et al, 2007).

Positivists believe that knowledge about people and the world around us can be gathered objectively and scientifically, (Thomas, 2009), that a single reality exists and that it can be rationally explained through well-designed studies (Lichtman, 2010). Research performed by positivists is quantitative in nature and requires random selection of a sample from the target population. This approach to sampling lends itself to generalisation of findings to the larger population (Carr, 1994).

One potential weakness of positivism is that particular set of data derived from positivist research can be used to support theories but at the same time may also be used to support contradictory hypotheses – it depends on the background assumptions being made by the researcher (Luttrell, 2009). Another potential limitation of positivist research can occur when a test of the research hypothesis fails to achieve the anticipated outcomes. In such cases, researchers may not reject the hypothesis but instead modify background assumptions in order to make sense of the data while retaining the original expectation (Luttrell, 2009).

In the mid-nineteenth century, many scholars, researchers and theorists began to rebel against the positivist paradigm. New schools of thought began to emerge, such as the post-positivist paradigm. Those in the social sciences in particular, sought alternatives to the quantitative and scientific nature of the positivist paradigm (Cohen et al, 2007). During the 1970s and 1980s, supporters of qualitative approaches began to advocate interpretivism, a paradigm which developed through the merging of a number of nineteenth and twentieth century academic beliefs (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Those who supported this view were known as interpretivists.

The primary principle underpinning interpretivism, which is the approach in this study, is an interest in people. According to Thomas (2009), interpretivist research is concerned with discovering how people think, act, form ideas and construct their individual worlds. These worlds are not straightforward and understanding is crucial. Researchers must immerse themselves in participants' lives, pay attention not only to the words of participants, but also to their non-verbal communication

and behaviours in order to gain comprehensive understandings of phenomena. They should seek to obtain ‘thick descriptions’ of participants’ experiences, thoughts and actions in order to achieve a broad understanding of a situation or phenomenon (Cohen et al, 2007). They must acknowledge background information such as race, gender and religion (Thomas, 2009). They should develop theory inductively, by repeatedly testing their explanations against knowledge gained from interaction with participants and they should also reflect deeply on their claims in order to minimise prejudice or influence (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

Interpretivist research methods which may obtain thick descriptions include interviews, focus groups, interviews, research diaries and case studies, as they allow multiple variables to be recorded (Vine, 2009). The intention of the researcher in this study was to carry out semi-structured interviews with seven guidance counselors. The researcher hoped that an interactive and flexible data collection method of this nature would allow for multi-sensory observation of participants, including spoken words, intonation, eye contact, body language and facial expressions (Thomas, 2009).

However, the interpretivist paradigm is not without its critics and limitations. One potential constraint of interpretive research is that by encouraging the research of small groups, it does not provide a platform for broader conclusions. Another is that this type of research can fail to categorically demonstrate that a particular set of factors played a key role in bringing about particular outcomes (Hammersley, 2007). Possible bias from researchers who see what they choose to is a further limitation of the interpretivist paradigm (Denscombe, 2007). Throughout this study, the researcher had to constantly reflect on the interaction, question style, verbal language as well as non-verbal communication with participants.

3.3 Access and Sampling of Research Participants

Similar to the previous study, the target population for this research was comprised of male and female qualified guidance counsellors in the East of Ireland who had at least five year’s experience at post-primary level. By having five year’s experience, it was hoped that they would have a good working knowledge of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector. Participants were aware of the subject being investigated and were informed before the interviews that the information they provided would only be used for the purpose of this research.

A population is the entire group of interest to which the findings of a study relate, however more often than not, researchers do not have access to an entire population and so have to generate a sample, which is a representative subset of this entire population (Robbins, 2008). There are two main groups of sampling types:

1. Probability sampling, where the likelihood of every member of the target population being selected is both equal and calculable. This form of sampling is popular for random and controlled trials which may be generalised to the entire target population.
2. Non-probability sampling, where the likelihood of a member of the target population being selected is uncertain. This form of sampling is not intended to be representative of the entire target population, but simply seeks to represent a particular cohort (Cohen et al, 2007).

Within these groups, there are a number of sampling methods, including:

1. Probability sampling, which includes simple random, stratified and cluster sampling.
2. Non-probability sampling, which includes convenience and snowball sampling.

The researcher used purposive sampling for this investigation, which involves recruiting participants on the basis of their potentially significant experience, information and insights on the research problem being examined (Hogan et al, 2009). Whilst this sampling method suited the researcher's needs, it was not assumed or intended that it would represent the entire population of post-primary guidance counsellors (Cohen et al, 2007).

The researcher sought to obtain a sample of guidance counsellors from different post-primary school types in the East of Ireland. It was hoped that this would provide a diverse range of data, insights and experiences of the ramifications of the Budget 2012 allocation removal. Due to the compact timeframe of the investigation and to ensure efficiency, it was felt that the participants should be located close to the researcher. The following means were used to locate the seven participants:

1. A verbal request was made for participants to partake in the research study at an IGC branch meeting in February 2014. Two participants were secured through this request.
2. Later that week, an email was sent to all branch members seeking participation in the investigation. Two further participants replied to this email indicating their willingness to participate.
3. The researcher contacted the Secretary of another IGC branch, who then read out the request for participation at the next branch meeting. The final three participants then contacted the researcher to indicate an interest in partaking in the investigation.

Having made initial contact with the seven participants, information letters (appendix A, p. 65) and consent forms (appendix B, p. 67) were then sent by email and signed before each interview.

3.4 Data Collection Method: Qualitative Interviews

The intention of the researcher was to carry out one-to-one interviews with seven guidance counsellors who had worked in the previous ex-quota system and are now working in the existing

post-budget system. The researcher believed that these practitioners were in the best position to help answer the new research questions of the expanded study.

The researcher hoped that an interactive and flexible data collection method, such as interviews would provide participants with opportunities to explain their unique thoughts, opinions and insights into their experiences as post-primary guidance counsellors. This strategy would allow for multi-sensory observation of participants, including spoken words, intonation, eye contact, body language and facial expressions. The order of the interview, the questions asked, as well as the depth of responses could also be controlled to by the researcher, while still allowing space for spontaneity (Cohen et al, 2007).

3.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

There are numerous types of interviews which a researcher can employ (Cohen et al, 2007). The researcher intended to carry out semi-structured one-to-one interviews with the research participants. This interview type is popular with qualitative researchers as it provides some structure and guidance while also allowing flexibility and potential for additional probing. It involves prepared and systematic questioning which is guided by predetermined themes, combined with the scope to probe further in order to elicit more elaborate responses (Qu and Dumay, 2011). It addresses a range of prepared topics and issues while still allowing space for spontaneity and freedom of thought or expression (Cohen et al, 2007). The researcher hoped that this would result in deep insights and findings relating to the research questions.

The immediate and face-to-face nature of interviews is a significant strength of this data collection technique. As there is no significant time delay in responses, the researcher can react immediately to participants' responses or actions (Opdenakker, 2006). For example, they can probe further if necessary, seek explanations and examples or attend to any issues which arise.

Adaptability and flexibility are key benefits of research interviews. They can be carried out in almost any setting and the scope of topics which can be discussed is almost unlimited (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Following on from this, research through interviews allows investigators to examine feelings, investigate and probe ideas forwarded by participants. The opportunity to observe participants' body language, tone of voice and facial expressions also exists (Bell, 2010). This can aid the development of thick descriptions which researchers cannot obtain through most quantitative research methods. Another advantage of semi-structured interviews arises when a topic yields interesting comments and insights. The nature of this approach allows for time and focus on this topic by not restricting researchers, but simply reminding them of the aims and objectives (Thomas, 2009).

Furthermore, the presence of the interviewer can help to clarify questions or issues which may arise (Robbins, 2008). However, this same presence may affect the precision and accuracy of the

research data. Clarification provided to participants may be inconsistent or they may interpret the clarification differently, thereby influencing responses and hence creating imprecision or bias (ibid).

Social desirability distortion refers to the tendency of respondents to answer questions in a more socially desirable manner in an interview than they might do in other conditions (Richman et al, 2009). This can affect the responses provided by participants during interviews in that they may avoid giving responses which they consider controversial or which might embarrass themselves or the researcher. They may also seek to offer responses that they feel the researcher wants or needs to hear, which Robson (2002) refers to as the ‘good bunny syndrome’. Furthermore, participants may also be having a bad day or become disinterested when the interview takes place (Richman et al, 2009). Each of these can threaten the reliability of the data collected. One way to minimise social desirability distortion is to use interviewers who resemble participants, such as women interviewing women. Another is to administer a questionnaire to participants, which they complete and submit shortly after the main interview has taken place (Robbins, 2008).

Thomas (2009) argues that although semi-structured interviews offer benefits from structured and unstructured interviews, they should not always be considered the best option. For example, if a researcher wants to be a participant observer who interprets interviewees’ comments, then the semi-structured approach may be too rigid and an unstructured approach may be more appropriate.

With regard to the limitations of the semi-structured interview method, interviews can be time-consuming in terms of preparation and the interview itself. In addition, transcription and analysis of complex qualitative data collected may take time (Opdenakker, 2006). In order to assist with this process, the researcher employed the assistance of a confidential transcription service. Furthermore, the small sample size which usually participates in exploratory interviews can threaten the validity of the research, thereby making this data collection method more appropriate for smaller exploratory studies (Robbins, 2008), as opposed to research which can be generalised to large populations.

Finally, bias is a potential disadvantage in using interviews. Time was spent considering interview schedules and questions to ensure that they did not unfairly lead participants (Bell, 2010). Further bias may occur through inconsistent coding of responses, poor rapport with participants and poor handling of difficult questions or interviews. Care was taken and systems put in place to ensure that these forms of bias were minimised (Cohen et al, 2007) by making early contact with participants by telephone to develop a relationship and outlining at the beginning of each interview that participants could decline to answer any particular question or stop the interview at any time.

3.4.2 Interview Schedule

Frameworks used during interviews can vary between tightly scripted and rather loose (Qu and Dumay, 2011). However, all frameworks serve the same purpose – to ensure that the same thematic

approach is applied during the interview. A pre-designed interview framework was used to guide the interview which consisted of various question types and styles (appendix C, p. 68). Basic questions were used at the outset in order to obtain factual data relating to the guidance counseling services in participants' schools as well as to alleviate any possible stress that participants might be feeling.

Further into the interview more comprehensive questions dealt with topics such as the role of guidance counsellors, professionalism, stress and resilience. There was a blend of closed-ended questions which enabled straightforward answers, and open-ended questions which required greater exploration of participants' opinions, experiences and unique realities. It was hoped that this approach would suffice in answering the research questions set out above.

The schedule of interviews is set out below (*fig. 3.1*). This provides details about participant, their schools and also indicates if they signed consent forms for participation in the research.

Fig. 3.1: Interview Schedule

	Date	Gender	Age Group	School Type	Consent Form
1 Fiona	10/3/2014	Female	30 – 40	Voluntary Secondary	Yes
2 James	11/3/2014	Male	40 – 50	Community/Comprehensive	Yes
3 Mary	12/3/2014	Female	40 – 50	Voluntary Secondary	Yes
4 Martin	14/3/2014	Male	50 – 60	Voluntary Secondary	Yes
5 Ciara	18/3/2014	Female	30 – 40	Voluntary Secondary	Yes
6 Amy	20/3/2014	Female	50 – 60	Voluntary Secondary	Yes
7 Emma	21/3/2014	Female	50 – 60	Voluntary Secondary	Yes

3.5 Objectivity, Validity and Reliability Qualitative Research

Objectivity is a cornerstone of the positivist paradigm. Researchers who support this approach believe that they must remain an outsider in order to obtain objective findings. They must park their beliefs and opinions and not allow these to impact on the research process for fear of a distorted picture of reality arising (Cohen et al, 2007). This is in stark contrast to the interpretivist approach where the researcher is considered a live and integral part of the investigation. In such explorations, researchers must acknowledge their own personal position and opinions on the topic, i.e. their subjectivity (Cohen et al, 2007) as this may create bias which could affect the data gathering and interpreting processes (Aldridge and Aldridge, 1996).

Validity in qualitative research is concerned with issues such as the integrity, depth and scope of the data acquired, the reflexivity of the researcher and the extent of triangulation (Cohen et al, 2007). According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), validity can be illustrated under three dimensions:

1. Internal validity: that a research instrument makes the distinctions that it intends to.
2. Conceptual validity: measuring a phenomenon according to how a theory has explained it.
3. External validity: that a phenomenon can be generalised to the conditions being explained

Furthermore, Thomas (2009) states that validity can be broken down into two types:

1. Instrument-based validity: the level of effectiveness in an instrument measuring what it is supposed to measure.
2. Experimental validity: the degree to which the design of an experiment controls and eliminates factors which could affect the research.

The researcher also engaged in ‘member checks’ during the data analysis. This involved going back to participants when the researcher was unsure how to interpret a comment, asking them to read a passage of the transcript and then clarify. This gave further credence to the data analysis.

Reliability relates to the ability of a research method to consistently provide similar outcomes on different occasions (Thomas, 2009). It can be considered as the match between what a researcher records as data and what actually happens in the natural setting of the research (Cohen et al, 2007). While reliability is applicable to quantitative research, some theorists question its relevance and suitability for qualitative research (Cohen et al, 2007; Thomas, 2009). For example, in the case of this study, research interviews are non-repeatable in nature. In fact, if participants’ meanings, realities and worlds are ever-changing, then researchers’ understandings may change too, thereby rendering replications of results neither practical nor possible (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

Whilst some theorists have questioned the relevance of the conventional inquiry requirements of reliability, validity and objectivity in interpretivist research, Guba (1985, in Hearne, 2009) believes qualitative researchers can replace these with four naturalistic criteria, which will help to generate trustworthiness in their research and findings (*fig. 3.2*):

Fig. 3.2: Criteria for Generating Trustworthiness

<u>Conventional Inquiry</u>	<u>Naturalistic Inquiry</u>
Truth Value (Internal Validity)	Credibility
Applicability (External Validity)	Transferability
Consistency (Reliability)	Dependability
Neutrality (Objectivity)	Confirmability

(Source: Lincoln and Guba, 1985:300)

1. **Credibility:** ensure that the credibility of the investigation is maintained. This can be achieved through the researcher's belief in the value of interpretive research, rigorous methods, as well as persistent observation of the process and self. In this study, the researcher engaged in exhaustive and detailed of constant comparison (Thomas, 2009) in order to achieve accuracy and credibility in the data analysis. This involved repeatedly reading and analysing interview transcripts while listening back to the recordings.
2. **Transferability:** provide a detailed, thick description of the setting to facilitate generalisation of the findings beyond the scope of the participants who have been interviewed so that the findings may be applied to other similar settings (Hearne, 2009). In order to satisfy this, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of participants' settings including gender, age, school type, student numbers and allocated guidance hours.
3. **Dependability and confirmability:** constantly seek to reflect on, examine and record the research methods used, data analysed and decisions made throughout the investigation. In order to strengthen the dependability of the research, the researcher interviewed both male and female participants, from various school types in the post-primary sector.

Finally, in relation to this study, reflexivity deals with acknowledging and understanding the existence of researchers within the worlds they are investigating. Their backgrounds, perceptions of research problems and opinions of paradigms can affect and influence research. Instead of hiding, they should acknowledge their position in the process, the world they are investigating and disclose themselves (Cohen et al, 2007). In order to acknowledge and understand the role played in this investigation, the researcher examined and acknowledged his position and assumptions as a trainee guidance counsellor who had carried out previous research in the field. While I was an insider in the sense that I work in post-primary guidance counselling, I was also an outsider in that I was entering into participants' lives and spaces. I was also an outsider to their personal experiences, their work and the services they provided. I believed that many practitioners were feeling stressed from their work and that there was a sense of confusion and lack of clarity around the defined role of post-primary guidance counsellors.

The researcher kept a diary, which before the interviews, consisted primarily of thoughts, ideas and concepts on the research topic. During the interviews this changed to interactions, thoughts and opinions on individual episodes. While acknowledging the researcher's position throughout the process, this diary also helped to minimise bias and influence.

Finally, prior to interviewing participants, the researcher tested the framework by interviewing one guidance counsellor who was not involved in the investigation.

3.6 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis is the process of using the data collected through research to analyse the situations researchers are investigating (Thomas, 2009). Put simply, it entails making sense of the data collected (Cohen et al, 2007). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), data analysis is a two-stage process. In step one, data analysis involves systematically searching and arranging the data into manageable units. The second step involves interpreting the data. Thorne (2000) states that the data collection and analysis processes tend to be simultaneous, with analysis informing the data collection process and new data informing the analysis process.

There are several methods which can be used when analysing qualitative data. Cohen et al (2007) outline five ways of organising and presenting qualitative data: by groups, individuals, issues, research questions or instrument.

Phenomenological data analysis seeks to discover some of the underlying structure or essence of a phenomenon through intensive study of individual cases (Thorne, 2000). Typological analysis involves putting data into categories and subsets based on clear criteria such as behaviour, relationships or settings (Cohen et al, 2007). Network analysis involves identifying topics and demonstrating how they relate using networks (Thomas, 2009). Narrative analysis is an approach that recognises the extent to which the stories we tell provide insights about our experiences (Thorne, 2000). Discourse analysis recognises and examines speech and language in trying to understand what is meant by the variety of ways through which people communicate ideas (Thorne, 2000).

The researcher analysed the qualitative data gathered during this investigation using the constant comparative method which involved repeatedly reviewing and comparing each element of collected data (Thomas, 2009). From this, themes and issues emerged, which were mapped out, compared and linked together. This strategy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.7 Ethics in Guidance Research

Generally speaking, ethics is a system or set of moral principles which groups of people or individuals adhere to (Robbins, 2008). Ultimately, it is about conduct and what people consider right or wrong. It encompasses decisions and behaviour of individuals and how these affect others. With regard to research, ethics is about the conduct of the researcher, how they carry out research and the respect shown to participants. While most people want to do what is right, researchers must consider that what they want might not be right for participants (Thomas, 2009).

Ethical issues relating to research in educational institutions can be complex and difficult to anticipate (Cohen et al, 2007). While this is true for all research methods, it is especially pertinent in relation to qualitative research (Cohen et al, 2007; Hearne, 2009). As with any ethical issues, ethical principles relating to research are ambiguous and should always be considered in light of the research

context (Cohen et al, 2007). Additionally, Hearne (2013) states that there are no certainties in research and practitioner-researchers need to make decisions about the research process in light of their personal values and professional ethics.

According to Cohen et al (2007), investigators partaking in practitioner-research must consider the potential social benefits against the potential personal costs to participants. Potential benefits from this research included:

1. Advancements in the knowledge of how post-primary guidance counsellors are experiencing the 2012 removal of the ex-quota allocation and how they feel about their profession.
2. Verification of how practitioners are coping with the changes in their work practice and how they feel about the profession of guidance counselling.
3. Capability to inform the wider community of practitioners and even policy makers on the issue.

Potential costs included:

1. The time it took to participate in the research as guidance counsellors already work within busy schedules.
2. Diminished dignity, embarrassment or lower self-esteem if difficult situations arose during discussion (Cohen et al, 2007).

It can prove a difficult balancing act, assessing potential benefits and costs and will be a unique process for each researcher. Investigators must use their personal judgement, values and experience when balancing these potential benefits and costs (Hearne, 2009).

Cohen et al (2007) identify three levels of ethical regulation which should be satisfied and which this researcher adhered to in this expanded study:

1. Institutional ethics: ethical approval for this research was given by the University's EHS Faculty Ethics Board on Wednesday 5th February 2014.
2. Professional ethics: as a member of a professional body, the researcher was bound by the IGC (2012) Code of Ethics in the conduct of this research, which sets out principles relating specifically to research:
 - a. Protect the dignity and wellbeing of research participants.
 - b. Take all reasonable steps to ensure that any collaborators treat participants in an ethical manner.
 - c. Conduct research in a way that is consistent with a commitment to honest, open inquiry, and communicate clearly any personal values or financial interests that may affect the research.

Additionally, the four main principles identified under the *Research Code of Ethics* (NCGE, 2008) were followed. They are respect for the rights and dignity of the person, competence, responsibility and integrity.

3. Personal ethics: On a personal level, the researcher continuously reflected on and questioned behaviour, thoughts, decision-making and interaction with participants, as well as the research topic under investigation (Thomas, 2009). The good faith that participants had shown was remembered, respected and remain central to all ethical decisions. Informed consent was obtained from participants in writing through written consent forms. By keeping a diary throughout the process, the researcher was consistently reflexive and acknowledged and addressed pertinent ethical issues as they emerged.

Researchers must seek informed consent from participants. This entails a clear understanding of the purpose of the research, how the information will be used, as well as rights relating to confidentiality, safety and privacy (Abrahams, 2007). The researcher made initial contact with potential participants by email. This message outlined the purpose of the research, areas to be covered, data collection method and how the collected data would be used. The researcher then asked participants to sign consent forms (appendix B, p. 67) before each interview.

All researchers have a duty of care to participants during and after interviews (Bond, 2004). Participants can reveal emotional and personal information which is important to them and which they perhaps did not intend to disclose. With this in mind, the researcher asked participants before each interview if they availed of supervision or other sources of support whom they could contact if distressing topics or situations arose.

Researchers must ensure that participants' comments, stories and data gathered throughout the interviews remain confidential and private (Robinson and Gross, 1986). As stated in the consent forms (appendix B, p. 67), all data could only be accessed by the investigator and research supervisor.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology which underpinned the research. Section one identified the primary and secondary research problems in the study. The rationale for selecting the interpretivist paradigm was addressed, while the chosen data collection method of semi-structured interviews was identified and critically analysed. Population access and sampling were discussed while issues surrounding objectivity, validity, and reliability in qualitative research were also considered. Finally, data analysis methods and ethical considerations were addressed. Chapter 4 will discuss data analysis strategy and present the primary findings from the interviews.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

The objectives of this chapter are to outline the data analysis strategy used in this expanded investigation, present the primary data findings from participant narratives, as well as identify the central themes which emanated from the research data.

4.1 Data Analysis Strategy

Analysis of qualitative data involves organising, ordering, clarifying and analysing the information gathered in the research data collection phase (Cohen et al, 2007; Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). According to Thomas (2009), there are many ways to analyse data and researchers must select the method which best suits their individual research approach.

For the purposes of this investigation, the researcher used the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative method for data collection. The constant comparative method of data analysis was selected, which entailed examining the interview transcripts several times and comparing the comments, responses and feedback from all participants (Thomas, 2009). During this process, the researcher used the split-page method for analysing and coding transcripts as well as writing notes. The data generated by participants was mapped out and linked (appendix D, p. 71) in order to produce topics and issues as well as three overarching themes of the Role of Guidance Counsellors in the Post-Primary Sector since Budget 2012; Stakeholders' Attitudes Towards Post-Primary Guidance Counselling; and Wellbeing amongst Post-Primary Guidance Counsellors in 2014.

The background data on the seven participants is included below (*fig. 4.1*). In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used throughout the research project.

Fig. 4.1: Participant Background Data

	Gender	Age Group	School Type	Students	No. of Guidance Counsellors
1 Fiona	Female	30 – 40	Voluntary Secondary	320	1
2 James	Male	40 – 50	Community/Comprehensive	880	2
3 Mary	Female	40 – 50	Voluntary Secondary	422	1
4 Martin	Male	50 – 60	Voluntary Secondary	530	1
5 Ciara	Female	30 – 40	Voluntary Secondary	350	1
6 Amy	Female	50 – 60	Voluntary Secondary	265	2
7 Emma	Female	50 – 60	Voluntary Secondary	300	1

4.2 Role of Guidance Counsellors in the Post-Primary Sector since Budget 2012

The first theme which emerged during the data analysis related to the role of post-primary guidance counsellors since the Budget 2012 allocation removal. There are a variety of topics within this theme which will be discussed, including the meaning of ‘appropriate guidance’, the whole-school approach (WSA) to guidance and disparities relating to this concept, as well as the diminishing visibility of practitioners in post-primary schools.

As stated previously, section 9(c) of the *Education Act, 1998* provides the core foundation on which post-primary guidance counselling is supposed to be enacted within the post-primary school system. According to the *Act*, “a school shall use its available resources to ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance” (Ireland, 1998). When asked to describe what ‘appropriate’ means, Amy, Fiona and Martin explained that the students’ needs, environment and context were different in each school, so guidance services can and should be tailored to unique situations. Martin emphasised that “different years have different priorities”. This indicates that guidance counsellors must not only provide services which suit their student body and school but tailor these to the age, makeup and requirements of individual years.

Amy and Ciara felt that having a full time guidance counsellor was central to the provision of ‘appropriate guidance’ in post-primary schools. Amy felt that in order “to adequately look after the students here, both from a vocation point of view, and from a counselling point of view you would need one ex quota guidance counsellor, 22 hours”. Mary echoed these sentiments, stating she believed ‘appropriate guidance’ entailed a practitioner being “be available to the students whenever they need it...that the guidance counsellor is not in the classroom teaching”.

With regard to the model of guidance counselling in post-primary schools, Amy said “I think it’s a very healthy model...it provides a filter where they can actually come into the guidance room and be themselves, and engage in some kind of support or counselling”. She also stated that she would “hate to see us going away from that model, where kids can present vocationally, and can work personally”. Fiona stated that she thinks “the role is fairly clearly defined” and is “a very valuable role...it makes a big difference to students and to staff actually”. Unfortunately, Ciara felt that there has been a shift away from the holistic post-primary guidance model which Amy mentioned, towards a classroom-based careers service, “dealing with your subject choice, dealing with your CAO”, which is not dissimilar to the model used in the UK.

Three participants, Emma, Ciara and Martin, referenced the DES (2005) guidelines on defining guidance counselling in post-primary schools that highlights the three separate yet interlinked areas of personal, educational and vocational counselling. All seven participants highlighted some elements of a Whole-School Approach (WSA) to guidance in their schools, which Martin believed has been clearly defined by the NCCA and responses from the IGC. However, there were variations in the

levels and approaches of the seven participants' schools to whole-school guidance. For example, Amy explained that they have year heads, Junior Cycle SPHE and tutor time with one period dedicated to this each week and "referrals would come through all of that". She believes that the system works for her school but it would "work better if we had more time to do it". James confirmed that there was a WSA to guidance in his school, involving good interaction with the SPHE and CSPE teachers, class tutors and year heads. He felt that they "have a good referral system which tries to...bring in the whole school so teachers can refer on to us" and even "students can refer on". James also stated that "individual teachers might get involved for certain things...like there's an LGBT group in the school". Ciara explained that the staff is now building a whole-school team and approach to guidance in her school. Emma stated that the staff in her school had a very positive attitude to guidance counselling but that the WSA to guidance in her school is "not great". She did, however, collaborate closely with both the Principal and Learning Support Teacher. Fiona also highlighted the importance of collaboration with the Learning Support Teachers, which takes the shape of weekly meetings. She stated that these meetings have "made a huge difference...a huge support to me and it means we keep an overview and we link in very well about different students". Unfortunately, there is limited collaboration and planning with other staff which she said is "a bit disjointed actually to tell you the truth...I would like to know what teachers do in SPHE for example".

There were significant discrepancies amongst the level of time allocated for and utilised by care teams within their schools. As highlighted above, Emma has regular meetings with her Principal and Learning Support Teacher, while Fiona has weekly meetings with the Learning Support Teachers. Mary's school have set up student support team which consists of the "Principal, the Deputy Principal, myself and two learning support people" and they meet once a week. James stated that there are care teams within his school but "they have slipped a bit, I'd say, just because of the pressure of time, not just in our department but in others". Unfortunately, Ciara and Martin said that they do not have any care meetings in their schools, which Martin felt was a "loss and its lack in the system at the moment is actually quite dangerous".

Several of the guidance counsellors acknowledged that they are experiencing a growing distance from their students, which culminated in decreased visibility and familiarity. Martin has witnessed deterioration in the relationship between him and the students which "would actually motivate a child to come and see you". He said that "it's not just a question of being physically present; if you're not visible on their radar...they won't be seeking you out". Similarly, Mary referred to "students who are in crisis...maybe the Junior end let's say...don't know who I am and therefore, won't come to me". Fiona also reflected the sentiments of Martin and Mary relating to familiarity and relationships with her students.

As in the researcher’s previous investigation (Connor, 2013), the issue of limited time emerged due to decreasing guidance hours being allocated to participants (*fig. 4.2*). Once again, the new narratives seemed to indicate diminishing time with Junior Cycle students. James felt that first and second years were losing out on time with guidance counsellors while Emma engages very little with the same year groups. Mary and Martin met with very few of the Junior Cycle classes while Amy said that first years get minimal contact time, second years get virtually nothing, third years get a module...prior to subject choice... it’s just totally unsatisfactory”. The focus for most of the guidance counsellors now appears to be on sixth years.

Fig. 4.2: Changes in Participants’ Guidance Hours, 2012 to 2014

	Pre-2012 Guidance Hours	Current Guidance Hours
1 Fiona	13 hrs	9 hrs
2 James	36 hrs	22 hrs 40 mins
3 Mary	22 hrs	12 hr
4 Martin	22 hrs	11 hrs 20 mins
5 Ciara	11 hrs	10 hrs
6 Amy	16 hrs 30 mins	10 hrs
7 Emma	13hrs	9 hrs 50 mins

4.3 Stakeholders’ Attitudes Towards Post-Primary Guidance Counselling

The second theme relates to stakeholders’ attitudes towards post-primary guidance counselling, including policy makers, school management, guidance counsellors, students, fellow teachers and parents.

When asked if they believed that guidance counselling was a profession, all participants stated that they believed it was. Martin pointed out that the profession has legal standing under the *Education Act, 1998*, whilst James highlighted the competency, remit and limits of the work that guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector should engage in. He also stated that practitioners “are part of a recognised body where we have a Code of Ethics”, further enforcing his belief that guidance counselling is indeed a profession. Ciara and Amy also felt that membership of a recognised representative body such as the IGC, as well as the existence of and adherence to an agreed code of ethics constituted a profession of guidance counselling in Ireland.

Several participants highlighted the professional training and qualifications which practitioners obtained as fundamental to identifying guidance counselling as a profession. Whilst James stated that a postgraduate guidance qualification is “an extra qualification that you have and an extra training that you have” which subject teachers do not, Amy was far more explicit, stating that “it’s distinctive from teaching...as a profession”. Mary felt that guidance counselling is actually a vocation, which suits particular types of people who display specific characteristics and attributes such as “a certain kind of personality, and empathy, warmth”. She also believes that not all teachers have the capacity or desire to work as guidance counsellors. Ciara also stated that professional training and qualifications were important in identifying guidance counselling as a profession, but felt that it was important guidance practitioners recognise and remember their professional limits and boundaries – they are not professional counsellors and can only go so far with students before needing to refer out to external services. She also stated that the proposed further training in counselling within her IGC Branch, which has now been postponed, would have further qualified practitioners and “been the cherry on the cake, we would have been 150% professional then”.

Both Mary and Emma highlighted the availability of CPD and supervision through the IGC branches and annual conferences as being integral to the professional status of guidance counsellors. They felt that it was important and positive that practitioners are encouraged to up-skill in order to contribute within the profession. James also emphasised the value of supervision, CPD sessions and in-service training in highlighting the professional role of guidance counsellors.

Amy and Emma also referenced the work and dedication of practitioners in their analyses of guidance counselling as a profession. Emma stated that elements of practitioners’ work such as privacy, confidentiality and ethics, recordkeeping, managing relevant stakeholders and “disseminating the information which you then have to impart to all of these people in different ways”, as well as developing working relationships and interactions with other outside agencies and professionals all indicated that guidance counselling is a profession. Both Amy and Catherine felt that many guidance counsellors are unhappy about their current work situation but are admirably doing their best by developing creative solutions to keep a functioning service afloat. For example, Mary takes work home in the evenings, while James brings in guest speakers to give talks which save him time and Emma has created guidance counselling Facebook and Twitter accounts to communicate with students on various matters such as third level courses, CAO applications and related news articles.

Despite the positive viewpoints of and work being done by the guidance counsellors in the study, there were differing views on other stakeholders’ perceptions of guidance counselling as profession. Fiona felt that changes to the title of Guidance Counsellor created confusion and undermined the good work being done by practitioners as “nearly nobody knows to use the term guidance counsellor”, and in fact, both colleagues and school management “would say guidance teacher a lot of the time or

careers teacher". She also wondered if parents really understand the service and feels that "they don't know like that you have...important, valuable stuff that actually they need to know on their kids' behalf". Mary felt that parents were aware of the service in post-primary schools but questioned whether they see it as a distinct profession or area of specialisation. Furthermore, she stated that the allocation removal had damaged parents' opinions of the service and those providing it. In contrast, James and Ciara stated that students and parents viewed guidance counselling as a profession, especially those who had direct contact with the service.

There were conflicting opinions amongst the participants about stakeholders' expectations of the guidance service. Fiona stated that the staff in her school have been very understanding about the change in allocation and hours, however the management have not been so considerate. Amy identified the financial constraints which are impacting on her work. The school has no money to fix her broken computer, yet the Government expects her to deliver a guidance counselling service with fewer resources which is unrealistic. She has a budget of €600 for the year which does not even pay for the aptitude testing of transition year students. She now corrects the CATS of incoming first years by hand to save money, which takes up considerable time in her schedule.

Ciara stated that the role of guidance counsellors has been compromised by the allocation removal in Budget 2012. She believed that practitioners do not have enough time to meet parents' expectations. Conversely, Fiona felt that she was "trying to nearly like protect parents from knowing...I don't want to be saying to parents like 'Sorry now I can't'...Sometimes I do". James felt that parents' expectations differ greatly from being "happy that their son or daughter is receiving...some pastoral care or support in school" to others who "think that it should be a full counselling service". He continued on to say that he was not "sure that parents understand how much it's been reduced... they probably don't realise that there has been a huge impact...or certainly that the explanation of what ex-quota meant".

Mary felt her students have been very understanding about the allocation removal, although they might not necessarily understand what it means, they do see that she is extremely busy every week. Fiona echoed these sentiments. On the other hand, Emma feels that students expect too much from guidance counselling services in that they expect practitioners to do almost everything for them, including complete PLC forms, whereas she said that the aim of the service is to promote responsibility in students for their actions, decisions and themselves.

Amy and Mary both expressed opinions that the DES and the Minister for Education and Skills do not respect, value or understand the work of guidance counsellors, let alone see it as a profession. Amy felt that the Minister thinks anybody can deliver guidance counselling in post-primary schools and that he has no appreciation of the base from which some students and parents are operating, in that they do not "understand CAO, they don't understand further education, they don't understand

Access, they don't understand HEAR, they don't understand DARE". She stated that their intellectual capital and daily experiences do not allow them to access this information and does not think that the Minister has any understanding of the huge information deficit that exists for students coming from socially disadvantaged environments. She believed that a two-tier system of guidance counselling is evolving in post-primary education, where the gap is widening between those who can afford and those who cannot. Mary stated that "if the work we did...was valued, and viewed as important by the Minister, and his staff, he would not have done what he did. I do not feel valued or important...in the eyes of the Department of Education... they've destroyed guidance". She also questioned the fact that chaplaincy services in post-primary schools were not curtailed when guidance counselling allocations were removed. She "didn't like it at the time, the possible...conflict when one service has been decimated and the other service, if it's in the school, can continue" but felt that one service had been pitted against another and that it said a lot about the Minister's opinion of guidance counselling.

Martin and Emma both identified what they believed to be a historical context or legacy which has been difficult to leave behind and is still damaging the guidance counselling profession today. Martin believed that some parents have negative attitudes to guidance arising from their own experiences of "poor quality teachers...who were struggling in classroom context being hived into guidance who inevitably ended up in many cases poor quality guidance counsellors...which was wrong". Similarly, Emma stated that "historically, guidance counsellors in schools weren't trained" and that they "might have been someone in the school who just wanted to do it or was shoved into it...and that started giving guidance counsellors bad names and it has been very hard to change". They believed that such anecdotal evidence caused damage to the image of the profession of guidance counselling.

4.4 Wellbeing amongst Guidance Counsellors in 2014

The third theme deals with issues surrounding the wellbeing of post-primary guidance counsellors in 2014.

James linked the increased volume of his workload to his feelings of stress and counters it through physical activity. He also identified the presence of a second guidance counsellor in the school as refreshing, "even just to talk to somebody about a particularly difficult case or just to run something by somebody, I think that's really important". Martin stated that he manages his wellbeing by "becoming actively conscious on a moment by moment basis of how fortunate I as a human being to have good health, love and affection".

Fiona is passionate about her school and work but is now feeling the stress and pressure of the allocation removal. Recently, she considered taking time off work as the stress she is feeling "is not sustainable for me...I know I'm overstretched, I know I'm not in a good place, I know it's not good for my health". She is now making mistakes, such as leaving messages for parents containing

sensitive information which should be communicated in person but she has been feeling so stressed that “I was like ‘Get this off my desk’...you get a bit ruthless and your judgement is a bit impaired”. Recently, two students did not arrive for personal counselling sessions, and she did not go looking for them as she was so busy preparing a programme to deliver to a full year group. She felt guilty afterwards, but felt she had to prioritise because of her busy schedule and limited resources.

Despite the fact that she is a qualified therapist, Fiona acknowledges that she does not manage her wellbeing effectively in spite of having considerable training and familiarity with theoretical perspectives on the topic. As she is only paid for nine hours in her school, she continues to work in private practice which she would prefer not to do but needs the money to pay bills and survive. While balancing this dual role of school work and private practice may prove difficult at times, it should be feasible given her limited school hours and the fact that she arranges her private sessions for evenings and weekends. However, the lack of resources in her school, pressure to deliver so much with so little, uncertainty of hours each year and compulsion to work beyond her nine hours have caused great stress for Fiona and the balancing of her school and private work.

Amy works in a school which is “not a DEIS school but we’re equivalent to a DEIS school”. She also felt that her work situation is more stressful now and “probably less satisfying, in that...there’s too many balls in the air, for the given time that you have”. She now works a “longer day obviously, not that people in industry do as well but on top of that you’re bringing work home”. Additionally, she highlighted a lack of satisfaction with the work she can do, “you’re shifting kids...you don’t have the same...sense of completion” and unfortunately she is “cutting your cloth to measure, and that brings frustrations”. She feels physically fatigued and brings this home, describing herself as “frazzled at times”. Like Fiona, Amy also felt that she managed her wellbeing badly. She tries to exercise when possible but finds that she only gets time to do this during the holidays.

Ciara is coping for the moment with the increased stress and pressure of work but that “cannot do it forever”. At the time of undertaking her postgraduate course in guidance counselling, she contemplated studying to become an educational psychologist instead and sometimes reflects on and even regrets her decision as she believes the profession has become unsustainable. She finds time for herself by praying, swimming and spending time with her family and friends and is now, more than ever, aware of having to relax after work but stated that unfortunately “not all practitioners practice what they preach”. Ciara feels that supervision provided through the IGC branches is vital for the wellbeing and welfare of guidance counsellors and the number of sessions each year should actually be increased instead of cut.

At this point, more than two years after the allocation removal, Mary is feeling tired and frustrated. She believed that the value of the service guidance counsellors provide has been completely undermined and she was “very very angry at...how it affects the students”. She tries not to let her

anger affect how she does her job, and feels “very lucky to have such an understanding husband, and my children I suppose, young and all as they are” who appreciate why she is so tired and drained after work.

In analysing the data from participants’ interviews, a common trend of exhaustion and disillusionment has arisen. It appears that practitioners are struggling to keep functioning guidance services in place and in order to do so are working far beyond their means. Unfortunately, this is causing stress and having negative impacts on the wellbeing of participants. When coupled with evidence of limited coping strategies, this indicates the emergence of a worrying phenomenon which is unsustainable.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings from interviews with seven participants who are practicing guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector by examining the lived experiences and multiple realities (Thomas, 2009) of this section of the guidance community. At times, participants’ views and comments concurred while in other instances their opinions and experiences differed widely. Through thematic analysis, three key themes emerged dealing with the role of guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector since 2012, attitudes towards post-primary guidance counselling and wellbeing among guidance counsellors. The overall findings of the investigation will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The aim of this discussion chapter is to synthesise the research findings in the context of the original research question, primary findings and literature review (Thomas, 2009). Reference will also be made to the previous study (Connor, 2013) in order to provide an expansive discussion on the topic. This chapter firstly provides an overview of the research findings followed by a discussion of the three overarching themes that emerged in the study.

5.1 Overview of Research Findings

The primary research question of this current investigation asked “*How are guidance counsellors managing their workload since the allocation removal in Budget 2012?*” From the findings of the previous study (Connor, 2013) the researcher believed that there were potentially insightful findings to be obtained further from practitioners about their work since the allocation removal and how they are managing to cope with the restructured nature of their profession. In addition to addressing the primary research question, this expanded study sought to investigate practitioners’ viewpoints on the role and workload of post-primary guidance counsellors, their current working conditions and how this change has affected them professionally. In this extended interpretivist study, three overarching themes were identified in the primary findings which the researcher believe address the original research questions. These three themes relate to the role of guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector since 2012, stakeholders’ attitudes towards guidance counselling and the wellbeing of guidance counsellors.

To summarise, the findings of this investigation as well as those from the previous research (Connor, 2013) are consistent with the findings of recent quantitative studies into the effects of the Budget 2012 allocation removal (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013; 2014; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013). These quantitative surveys indicate a decrease in hours allocated for guidance counselling, a decline in personal counselling services for students, a lack of guidance to Junior Cycle students, issues with supervision attendance and use of external counselling services in the school system. The findings of this investigation also concur with previous investigations (Hayes and Morgan, 2011; McCoy et al, 2006) detailing the inconsistent nature of the whole-school approach (WSA) to guidance, as well as the lack of guidance provided for Junior Cycle students.

The findings from the narratives of the research participants’ on the key stakeholders’ opinions of post-primary guidance counselling also correspond with existing literature on this matter (DES, 2009; Hayes and Morgan, 2011; McCoy et al, 2006) indicating stakeholders’ general satisfaction with the service despite some lingering uncertainty about what it can provide and achieve. Additionally,

although the findings reinforce the dedication of practitioners to their students and profession, the restructured nature of practitioners' work is now impacting on their professional and personal wellbeing. In addition to identifying the various types of stress that guidance counsellors are encountering (Burke, 2010; Gallie, 2013), the findings indicate that limited formal mechanisms have been introduced by the DES or IGC to assist guidance counsellors since 2012. Furthermore, the coping strategies employed by the practitioners themselves to manage their increased stress levels and capacity to execute their role are quite varied. The three overarching themes which will now be addressed in more detail are:

1. Role of Guidance Counsellors in the Post-Primary Sector since Budget 2012.
2. Stakeholders' Attitudes Towards Post-Primary Guidance Counselling.
3. Wellbeing amongst Guidance Counsellors in 2014.

5.2 Role of Guidance Counsellors in the Post-Primary Sector since Budget 2012

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the role of guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector has changed significantly since the Budget 2012 allocation removal. The increased prominence of the WSA to guidance (DES, 2012, 2013a; 2014) appears to have created inconsistent levels of service for students, while many guidance counsellors are now struggling to manage two very different roles in their schools – one of a qualified guidance specialist and another of a subject teacher. The findings from this study also concur with those of recent investigations (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014; JMB, 2012; NCGE, 2013) in highlighting that Junior Cycle students appear to be suffering the most by missing out on opportunities to work with their guidance counsellors, while personal counselling services have been severely reduced.

Section 9(c) of the *Education Act, 1998* outlines a legal requirement for schools to use their resources to “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices”. A number of the practitioners' in the current study mentioned the DES (2005) guidelines developed in response to the Education Act, 1998 which highlight the three separate yet interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance as central to their role within the school. However, a key issue that emerged is significant confusion over the term ‘appropriate’ which seems to have been misappropriated at times over the years. For example, Amy and Fiona stated that provision of ‘appropriate guidance’ differs from school to school as each has unique student requirements. Certain schools require extended levels of personal guidance, while others have greater demands for career guidance. Some schools have chaplains who carry out personal counselling duties, whereas others employ external counsellors to carry out such work. It is clear that no two post-primary guidance services are identical, nor should they be. In light of the Budget 2012 allocation removal, school Principals and Boards of Management

now have greater freedom, responsibility and independence to allocate and manage staff locally (DES, 2012). This increased autonomy may appear logical in policy terms; however the issue arises as to whether guidance counsellors will receive sufficient hours to deliver ‘appropriate guidance’ for their students, as this was already an issue before the allocation removal (DES, 2009; Hayes and Morgan, 2011; McCoy et al, 2006).

While it appears that the participants in this study agree with the sentiment that guidance counselling services should be localised and tailored to individual schools, it would appear that they are dissatisfied about the effect on the level and quality of service for their students. For instance, the DES (2005; 2009; 2012; 2013a; 2014) states that guidance should be delivered through a WSA which entails a whole-staff approach for the entire student body. Theoretically, this should place guidance counselling at the centre of education and make it an integral element of each school (Gysbers and Norman, 2001). In this study, James outlined an effective WSA approach employed in his school that encompasses form teachers, care teams, and various groups such as LGBT. He also described a functioning and effective referral system, while Mary identified the positive work being done by student support teams in her school. However, other guidance counsellors such as Martin and Ciara do not have care teams in their schools and Emma questioned the effectiveness of the care team in her school as she feels it lacks focus and direction. Fiona said that her weekly meetings with the learning support team had been very useful, but despite a positive attitude towards pastoral care and guidance counselling, the WSA in her school is disjointed. Although it is evident that the WSA differs significantly from school to school, the level of implementation and effectiveness, which is a longstanding issue (DES, 2009; McCoy et al, 2006) seems to vary significantly and must be examined in greater detail to ensure that students receive ‘appropriate guidance’.

The current findings also elucidate an important issue in the whole-school provision of guidance counselling with regard to the decrease in time available for practitioners to see Junior Cycle students. Previous publications (DES, 2009; McCoy et al, 2006) highlighted the decreasing opportunities that practitioners have to work with these younger students recommending an increase in provision, yet the situation is evidently deteriorating. All seven participants now spend the majority of their time on the various requirements of sixth year students. Transition Year groups also receive some attention through a mix of class time, work experience and subject choice, whilst contact with fifth year students appears to be through a careers class, which some participants offer on a modular basis. The major losers appeared to be second and third year students, whom Ciara, Emma, Mary, Martin and James are all seeing less of now. This is a major concern for practitioners as these students now have less opportunities to meet their guidance counsellors and consequently significant personal issues may remain unaddressed or become further exacerbated (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013; 2014; JMB, 2012). McCoy et al (2006) outline that this lack of time with Junior Cycle students is a major problem for

schools who have early school leavers as they will enter the world of work or training with little or no guidance at all. Unfortunately, this problem seems to be worsening since 2012. Another potential problem which was identified from this reduced contact time with Junior Cycle students is the diminishing level of visibility for guidance counsellors, manifesting in a lack of familiarity with the students. This is a worrying phenomenon as a strong relationship is vital if students are to become accustomed to and engage with guidance practitioners now and in the future. Students need to know the guidance counsellor's name and face; otherwise they will not approach to seek help (McCoy et al, 2006; Smyth et al, 2011).

In the findings, Mary, Ciara and Emma highlighted the issue of dual roles that many guidance counsellors, including six out of the seven participants from this investigation, are attempting to manage presently. This supports the IGC (2014) findings that approximately 31.8% of practitioners' overall timetabled classroom periods now consist of curricular subject teaching since Budget 2012. Similar to the lack of class time with Junior Cycle students, this issue is also impacting on the visibility of guidance counsellors' in post-primary schools as they are simply too busy to meet with students for guidance interventions. Additionally, the level of service that practitioners can provide has also diminished as they can no longer focus solely on providing a comprehensive guidance service to students. The reality is they are now juggling the guidance role with the demands of preparation and teaching of curricular subjects. Consequently, the level of guidance offered to students has become fractured, compromising the duty of care and quality of provision. This dual role is not only difficult for guidance counsellors to manage but is also confusing for students due to the conflict between the pastoral care role of the guidance counsellor and disciplinary role of the teacher, with both being fulfilled by the same person (McCoy et al, 2006).

Findings from the ASTI (2012), IGC (2013, 2014), JMB (2012), NCGE (2013) as well as the researcher's previous investigation (Connor, 2013) identify varying reductions in the amount of one-to-one personal counselling being carried out by post-primary guidance counsellors since 2012. The findings from this research concur with these findings as several participants identified this element of the service as suffering the most. James's school now employs an external counsellor to work with students, whilst Emma, Mary and Fiona simply do not have enough time to meet the personal requirements of their students anymore. Although the DES (2005) highlights the importance of the personal counselling element of the service, it fails to mention this personal role later in its Inspectorate Report (2009). Even though the intention of the allocation removal was not to impinge on the opportunities for students to work with guidance counsellors on personal matters, it appears that this is occurring. It calls into question the ability of schools, and more specifically guidance counsellors, to meet the complex needs of their students. It also raises doubts over the commitment of the DES to post-primary guidance counselling and specifically the personal counselling element, as

well as the future direction of the guidance in recent policies (2013a; 2013b; 2014). This new direction is viewed by Ciara in the study as mirroring the newly evolved English model of post-primary guidance provision. Conversely, at a time when there is a strong focus on guidance in Europe, as highlighted by CEDEFOP (2011), Ireland and England have taken a retrograde step.

The new direction of post-primary guidance counselling in Ireland raises questions about the service's capacity to meet the public policy objectives of lifelong learning, social inclusion, labour market efficiency and economic development, which are closely linked with the objectives of the 2000 Lisbon Council (CEDEFOP, 2008). For example, whilst it is argued that guidance and education on the whole reinforce inequality among social classes through selection and stratification, they also resist social and economic inequality through development of learning and critical consciousness (Lynch and Baker, 2005). A key outcome of guidance counselling is social inclusion in the form of access to information, education, advice and training (McCarthy, 2012; OECD, 2004; Watts, 1999), which is critically important for disadvantaged young people who have limited access to or no education and training whatsoever (Evans and Rallings, 2013). However, in passionately stating that a two-tier system of guidance is emerging, one of the guidance counsellors, Amy, questioned whether a profession with depleted resources can sincerely deliver on the objective of a level playing field for those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

As Gysbers (2001) explains in relation to the American education system, if guidance counselling is to deliver on the objectives set out for it, such as those from the DES (2005), NCGE (2004) and NGF (2007), then the work which guidance counsellors do and the services they provide must be considered integral and central elements of post-primary Irish education. Recent decisions and policies in Ireland indicate that this is not the case and the question of whether guidance will ever be central to education and as effective as it could be must be considered.

5.3 Stakeholders' Attitudes Towards Post-Primary Guidance Counselling

The second overarching theme that emanated from the findings is the issue of guidance counselling as a profession in its own right and the attitudes of key stakeholders towards post-primary guidance counselling in general. The stakeholders include policy makers, school management, guidance counsellors, students, fellow teachers and parents.

5.3.1 Attitudes of Policy Makers

The attitudes the DES and Minister for Education and Skills emerged as a controversial issue for participants in this study as they felt there was a lack of understanding of the role and service within the Department. In terms of understanding the work of practitioners, the Minister (2014) believes that the "two traditional aspects to guidance counsellors are pastoral care and actual career guidance",

which contradicts the DES (2005) guidelines promoting the three areas of personal, vocational and educational counselling. As stated earlier the DES (2005) refers to the importance of the personal counselling element of the service, yet fails to mention this at all in the 2009 Inspectorate Report. However, recent DES initiatives on wellbeing (2013a) and bullying (2013b) once again mention the importance of the personal counselling aspect of the role.

When one considers the allocation removal, the fact that the associated chaplaincy services remained unscathed from Budget 2012, the increased emphasis on the WSA to guidance (DES, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), the contradictions within DES policies on the importance of personal counselling (DES, 2005, 2009, 2013a, 2013b) and the Minister's underwhelming comments on the profession (2014), it would suggest a lack of understanding of the work of post-primary guidance counsellors.

5.3.2 Attitudes of School Management

Whilst participants in this study were not directly asked to about the attitudes of school management towards guidance counselling, the research findings indicate the existence of diverse attitudes, opinions and knowledge of guidance services amongst school management, which is consistent with the findings of McCoy et al (2006), as well as Hayes and Morgan (2011). In terms of the primary findings, it would appear that the relationship between guidance counsellors and Principals has become critical in relation to school managers' decisions about guidance allocations and resources with some practitioners experiencing negative interactions, and at times strained communication with the Principal. In one participant's case, this resulted in the absence of a care team in the school. However, in another case, an excellent working relationship existed between the participant and the Principal, which resulted in extra hours being allocated to guidance, as well as additional CPD sessions being paid for from school funds.

Prior to the allocation removal, Hayes and Morgan (2011) stated that guidance counsellors were seen to be at the mercy of their Principals who could allocate guidance counselling resources as they wished. With the increased autonomy given to Principals by the DES (2012) this situation seems to have become increasingly difficult with regard to allocated hours. Principals are now being forced to make difficult decisions about subject hours, class groups and levels, subject options and guidance hours (ASTI, 2013; JMB, 2012). Essentially, guidance is now competing with curricular subjects for space on school timetables. This is a dangerous situation for both students and guidance practitioners as it offers no minimum service levels and provides little consistency across different schools.

5.3.3 Guidance Counsellors' Attitudes

From the perspective of the practitioners the findings demonstrate a sense of pride about the professional service they are attempting to provide and the positive outcomes for students. Some

highlighted the existence and membership of a recognised representative body (IGC) with an agreed code of ethics as integral to guidance counselling's professional standing. Others stated that the professional training and postgraduate qualifications required to work as a post-primary guidance counsellor contribute further to this standing as a profession in its own right.

There are numerous definitions of professionalism, such as internal beliefs about attitudes, values, obligations, attributes, interactions, and role behaviour (Swisher and Page, 2005), or the set of qualities that an occupation or its members possess, claim or ought to possess (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996). Phelps (2006) asserts that professionalism in education is determined by the sets of values and beliefs which teachers have internalised and continues on to state that teachers should engage in reflection and dialogue on their professionalism. For guidance counsellors in the Irish post-primary sector, this reflection and dialogue takes the form of CPD sessions which are organised through the IGC branches and its annual conference. During these sessions, practitioners are encouraged to continuously reflect upon, develop and improve the service they provide to students and clients. Reid (2010) states that it is also important for guidance counsellors to develop their own self-management skills to manage their professional practice. Irish practitioners do so through supervision sessions with qualified moderators that are organised by the DES and IGC, and the benefit of this was articulated by some of the participants in the study.

Despite the restructuring of post-primary guidance counselling, participants in difficult situations are striving to deliver the most effective service they can for their students. Some of the participants' typified this work and dedication in their interactions and role behaviour (Swisher and Page, 2005) through the use of Facebook and Twitter to respond to student issues and questions and the use of guest speakers in the guidance classes. However, despite these innovative ideas, it is evident that practitioners are being stretched beyond their capacity with the work now encroaching on their personal time.

5.3.4 Attitudes of Students' and Fellow Teachers

In terms of others stakeholders' opinions of guidance counselling, some participants felt that students value and respect their work, particularly students who have had direct contact with the guidance services. This concurs with the NGF (2007b) findings which state that 80.5% of student respondents who availed of guidance counselling services in school found them to be 'very helpful' or 'helpful'. It would also appear that while most students do not fully understand the allocation removal, they do see that their guidance counsellors are inundated with work and are doing their best to maintain adequate service levels. Nonetheless, there still appears to be some disparity between students' expectations of guidance and the aims of the service in relation to developing autonomy and self-responsibility (McCoy et al, 2006). For example, Emma stated that some students expect too

much from the service in the form of handholding, which is unrealistic and can place unfair expectations on practitioners.

There were varying comments from participants about fellow teachers' perceptions of guidance counselling, with some stating that staff in their schools had positive opinions of the service. However, it emerged in the researcher's previous study (Connor, 2013) that there are cases where teachers have been envious of the lack of timetabled class periods, separate office and close relationship with management. Interestingly, Ciara stated that the allocation removal and subsequent restructuring has provided opportunities for subject teachers to discover more about the work she does in her school. The changed provision has brought guidance to the fore and teachers are now aware of the difficult situation she is in. While many different staff members, such as subject teachers and programme coordinators are involved in the planning and delivery of guidance (DES, 2009), Emma and James stated that it is important for guidance counsellors to seize this unintended yet suitable opportunity to remind staff of the services the WSA to guidance provides as well as the benefits of such an approach for the entire school community.

5.3.5 Parents' Attitudes

Finally, parents are also key stakeholders of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector. However, the findings suggest that the historical legacy of parents' own negative experiences of guidance during their time in school may have led to some parents' viewing guidance as ineffective. Furthermore, the possible use of unqualified guidance counsellors in their school in earlier years may be contributing to the negative perception of modern post-primary guidance counselling. This issue is now extremely pertinent, as the IGC (2014) states that approximately 10.5% of post-primary schools are now employing unqualified staff who have no training or access to CPD and supervision. If this trend should continue, the profession and its reputation may be severely compromised.

5.4 Wellbeing amongst Guidance Counsellors in 2014

The third overarching theme that emerged in the findings was the issue of wellbeing amongst guidance counsellors, which is influenced by various factors including workload, professional autonomy and stakeholders' expectations (Hearne, 2012a).

A key factor that influences wellbeing is stress, which can be defined as psychological and physiological reactions to events in an environment, and is an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal which can be experienced in situations that people perceive to be threatening to their well-being (Joseph, 2013). While numerous factors can affect stress levels, several participants in this study, as well as others in the researcher's previous investigation (Connor, 2013), indicated factors outlined by Burke (2010), including workload and increased work intensity. For example,

Fiona felt that she was “overstretched...not in a good place” which resulted in her making mistakes and considering taking stress leave as the workload and pressure are so overwhelming. Amy’s work situation has become more stressful and less satisfying as “there’s too many balls in the air”, while Mary has also struggled and is feeling “tired and frustrated”. At this time of depleted resources and increased demand for their services, it would appear that some guidance counsellors are focussing on their students’ needs so much that they are losing sight of their own requirements (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Practitioners must be wary of the ‘treadmill effect’ (Hearne, 2012b) and be willing to turn down work if it is compromising their ability to work and live effectively.

It would also appear that the organisational restructuring (Burke, 2010) of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector has had negative effects on the emotional wellbeing of guidance counsellors. James, Fiona and Ciara were all concerned about missed opportunities to work on students’ personal issues and decision-making. Emma pointed to the guilt she feels from not being able to see students as much as she would like to, while Mary was visibly angry towards the DES and Minister for Education and Skills, who ultimately decided to remove the ex-quota allocation. From the findings it is evident that there is a strong commitment from practitioners to their students and role, but the issue of boundary negotiation is also important for healthy levels of wellbeing. While this ability to develop such management skills may come with experience, the need for a balance between empathic attachment to students and self-care is recommended in the literature (Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison, 2011). Failure to do so could result in further damage to practitioners’ emotional wellbeing, and the guidance service may become diminished.

Gallie (2013) asserts that major decreases in staffing numbers, as well as a combination of high demand and low control, can form the basis of problematic patterns and potential stressors. This is extremely pertinent for guidance counsellors who, for example, are struggling with the issue of the moratorium on recruitment and non-replacement of staff. Several studies (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2013a, 2014; JMB, 2012) indicate the increasing numbers of guidance counsellors returning to teach academic subjects leaving fewer practitioners to provide guidance. Fiona referred to the lack of planning, foresight, preparation and certainty of hours before the beginning of the school year as a source of significant stress for her. Martin highlighted the failure of management to organise care meetings, an important element of the WSA to guidance, which clearly demonstrates his lack of control in his work and in organising a functioning guidance service. When these instances are combined with an increased demand for the service, a proliferation of the issues presenting to practitioners’ (Connor, 2013), decreased control over service delivery, the wellbeing of practitioners’ becomes compromised.

According to the findings, there are significant disparities in how participants manage their wellbeing at a time when their work conditions have altered significantly. A range of informal coping

strategies, or emphasis on their “external life” (Hearne, 2012b, p. 5) emerged including running, swimming, walking, attending church, reading and going to theatres and book clubs, which helped practitioners bracket off their work. Some participants had become more resolute in terms of separating work and managing their wellbeing since the Budget 2012 allocation removal. Despite the fact that they are qualified professionals who focus on the welfare of others there was little evidence of participants engaging in personal therapy (Yalom, 2011) for self-care or seeking support and guidance from experienced and qualified supervisors (Reid, 2010), other than through the supervision organised by the DES and IGC. All of participants in the current study emphasised the importance of this professional supervision with some stating the presence, support and advice from colleagues and supervisors was vital for practitioners, now more than ever. However, for others who are too busy to attend supervision, they were being forced to compare the benefits of it against the possibility of seeing more students with their limited time, thus regularly missing supervision. Whilst these decisions are admirable and understandable, it is important that practitioners are reminded of the benefits (IGC 2013; 2014) for their students of attending supervision, in addition to the personal gains.

It would appear that the coping strategies employed by participants since the Budget 2012 allocation removal are ad-hoc and disjointed. Aside from supervision arranged by the IGC, there needs to be a more coherent approach to assisting guidance counsellors in managing the restructured nature of their work in the post-primary sector. Whilst practitioners must take some personal responsibility for their wellbeing, perhaps additional supervision, which has already been suggested in previous investigations (Hayes and Morgan, 2011) ought to take on more credence now through support from the DES and IGC.

Finally, when numerous stakeholders have varied opinions and expectations of guidance counselling, this can lead to unfulfilled needs as well as role conflict for guidance counsellors as they struggle to respond to the variety of expectations created by different groups (Gysbers, 2001; Hearne, 2012b). Whilst the findings have highlighted issues related to the expectations of and attitudes towards post-primary guidance counselling, there appears to be a disparity between policy on one hand and the practice of guidance counselling on the other. It is imperative that clear and attainable expectations for guidance counselling are outlined, which involves clearly communicating to students, teachers, school management and parents, the function and scope of the post-primary guidance service.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has critically discussed the overall findings of the research study with the literature. Key issues that emerged include the role of guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector since

2012, attitudes towards guidance counselling, and the wellbeing of guidance counsellors in current practice. Chapter 6 will conclude the research study by proposing areas of further research which have emerged from this investigation.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research study by presenting a summary of the findings in the context of the original aim and objectives. Additionally, it describes the strengths and limitations of the study, provides recommendations and identifies personal learning for the researcher.

6.1 Overview of the Research Findings

The overarching aim of the researcher's original study (Connor, 2013) was to examine the impact of the Budget 2012 removal of the ex-quota allocation for guidance counselling in post-primary schools. While the primary aim remained the same for this further investigation, there were more focussed objectives relating to participants' perceptions on the profession of guidance counselling in Ireland, the changed nature of their work role, potential stresses, coping strategies. In order to investigate the topic in more detail this expanded study involved interviews with seven post-primary guidance counsellors from different schools to the previous study.

A number of key findings emerged from the investigation, which elucidate current issues in post-primary guidance practice. Firstly, it appears that like the DES, practitioners believe that the interpretation of 'appropriate' (*Education Act, 1998*) differs from school to school as the students' needs, environments and contexts are diverse in each case. However, the meaning of 'appropriate' differs greatly between practitioners and the DES and has in fact been misappropriated in recent years. Participants interpret it as having a fulltime professional who provides students with personal, educational and vocational guidance and they place significant emphasis on the personal counselling element of the role. Whilst the DES use the same terminology, it appears to place less emphasis on the personal guidance element provided by practitioners and instead focuses on holistic development through students interacting with all school staff.

The DES (2005) promotes the delivery of guidance through a whole-school approach (WSA) involving different staff such as SPHE teachers, programme coordinators, parents, school management and guidance counsellors. However, there appears to be a significant disparity between policies on the WSA and the nature of its evolution in schools today. The research findings indicate varying levels of whole-school guidance, ranging from full-scale models with tutors, year heads, care teams and participation from staff, to no WSA at all in some schools. This is disconcerting as there appears to be a shift in emphasis by the DES (2009, 2012, 2013a, 2014) from post-primary guidance by qualified practitioners towards the entire staff body in schools, yet the level of whole-staff participation appears to be inconsistent and unreliable. Consequently, the level of care which schools

can provide to their students varies widely (Hayes and Morgan, 2011; McCoy et al, 2006), which is rather worrying for parents and students alike.

Secondly, the research findings support the conclusions of recent investigations (ASTI, 2013; JMB, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014; NCGE, 2013) in identifying the trend of less time being spent with Junior Cycle students and more emphasis now on meeting the needs of Senior Cycle students. As guidance counsellors have less time to carry out the work they are qualified to do, they are being forced to make difficult decisions about which students to exclude. The findings also concur with recent investigations (ASTI, 2013; JMB, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014; NCGE, 2013) on the growing issue of the dual role of guidance counsellors in the system with the increase in practitioners' teaching curricular subjects. This simply must detract from the level of guidance they can provide to students, in terms of depth and time. Additionally, the two functions clash when emergencies occur as participants in the study highlighted examples of leaving full classrooms to attend to distressed individual students. This is clearly unsustainable and inappropriate. A conflict of roles is also developing in terms of the disciplinary position of class teachers and the pastoral care focus of guidance counsellors, leading to identity confusion for students and practitioners alike.

Thirdly, findings from this study also suggest the emergence of a growing distance and lack of visibility between guidance practitioners and students, primarily Junior Cycle students, resulting from the decreased contact time with these students. Participants highlighted this as a relational issue, in stating that students present themselves or refer friends when they are comfortable with the guidance counsellor in their school. This concurs with previous investigations, such as McCoy et al (2006) and Smyth et al (2011). Participants felt that unfortunately, since Budget 2012, this is not the case in some schools and that opportunities to intervene and work with vulnerable or distressed students are diminishing. Consequently serious personal issues are going unnoticed and not being addressed appropriately. In order to deal with these potential issues, the DES has launched several initiatives (DES, 2013a, 2013b, 2014) to direct schools in managing students' personal issues such as wellbeing, mental health and bullying through a WSA approach. However, there appears to be significant contradictions in guidance policies from the DES and guidance practice in schools where practitioners are working with fewer resources.

Fourthly, it would appear that despite their own positive views of the profession, practitioners believe that there is confusion amongst key stakeholders about the work they do. Whilst they believe that students for the most part, understand and appreciate the role of guidance counsellors, the opposite is true of the DES and school management. There are also varying degrees of understating and awareness amongst parents, with some having negative perceptions of the service from their own time in school. Interestingly, some participants indicated that awareness of guidance counselling had increased among subject teachers as the topic was at the forefront of education issues after the 2012

allocation removal. The findings concur with Hayes and Morgan (2011) on the range of attitudes and knowledge amongst school principals about guidance counselling. This array of attitudes and lack of clarity on the role can create unrealistic expectations and of the practitioner and the service. It is a point of concern when one considers the increasing numbers of schools employing unqualified guidance counsellors (IGC, 2013; 2014) which could severely damage the image of the profession.

Fifthly, the findings from this study and the previous investigation (Connor, 2013), indicate that some that practitioners are feeling considerable stress and pressure in their work, resulting from the restructuring of guidance counselling in post-primary schools. This has affected the wellbeing and personal lives of several participants. At present, some participants are managing their wellbeing through their “external life” (Hearne, 2012b, p. 5), yet these methods are informal and inconsistent. There is a responsibility on guidance counsellors to take care of themselves and as such there is little evidence of practitioners engaging in counselling support to assist themselves at this time. The DES, with the IGC, do provide professional supervision which most attend and gain from professionally (IGC 2013, 2014). Nevertheless, additional support from the DES and IGC is recognised as a real need for practitioners in current practice.

Finally, despite the difficult circumstances in which guidance counsellors are now working, the participants in this study indicated a great sense of pride in their work. They firmly believe that guidance counselling is a profession worth valuing. It is highly specialised and involves professional and postgraduate training, ongoing supervision, as well as membership of a representative body which provides professional training and adheres to an agreed code of ethics (IGC, 2012).

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Study

A key strength of this study was the interpretivist paradigm which underpinned the research. Through this approach, the researcher was able to observe insightful subtleties and complexities among the participants, which may have gone unnoticed if the researcher had adapted a more positivist approach (Cohen et al, 2007).

By entering the worlds of seven practicing guidance counsellors, the researcher was able to develop thick descriptions (Thomas, 2009) of their individual worlds and guidance in the post-primary sector. These descriptions helped develop participants’ stories and broaden the researcher’s understanding of their experiences, which would not have been possible through quantitative research (Thomas, 2009).

An additional strength of the study is the enthusiasm and willingness demonstrated by the participants. Participants admirably gave up their time and demonstrated dedication and sincerity to

this investigation, but more importantly to the profession of guidance counselling, the Irish education system and their students.

Whilst the researcher adapted rigorous and sustained data analysis procedures, the issue of personal bias can be an issue in qualitative research. Both the analysis of data and management of bias were dependent on one individual. In order to manage this, the researcher acknowledged his position and assumptions on the topic as well as his role in the research process (Cohen et al, 2007). In addition, he kept a diary which included thoughts on the topic, details of interactions with participants as well as opinions on responses and comments from participants (Thomas, 2009).

Whilst the effects of the Budget 2012 ex-quota allocation removal have been examined previously (ASTI, 2013; JMB, 2013; IGC, 2013, 2014; NCGE, 2013), these investigations were carried out at national level and so the findings may be more generalisable to the population of post-primary guidance counsellors. The sample for this investigation was small and the findings cannot be generalised from this smaller group to the entire population of post-primary guidance counsellors. This investigation simply provides insights into the impact of the re-allocation through a more subjective approach.

6.3 Recommendations

The researcher is putting forward a number of recommendations arising from this study in relation to policy, practice and research:

1. The DES must reverse the Budget 2012 allocation removal. While school managers now have increased autonomy to decide how many hours should be allocated to guidance counselling, it is clear that such policies have damaged the effectiveness of services for students, especially those in the Junior Cycle.

2. The DES needs to further clarify the meaning of ‘appropriate guidance’ in post-primary schools. From this, it would be possible to identify more specific responsibilities of guidance counsellors and hence improve the services provided to students.

3. The DES needs to publish literature highlighting how schools can implement a WSA to guidance counselling. This can help provide direction for practitioners and school management as well as clarifying the roles of other stakeholders. The DES needs to specifically address the remit of guidance counsellors with regards to the personal counselling aspect of the service, in addition to how this role can be developed and evaluated.

4. The IGC needs to communicate more effectively with parents, students and the wider public to outline the role, remit and aims of post-primary guidance counselling.

5. Guidance counsellors and school management must to take some responsibility for communicating the work of practitioners to key stakeholders. They can do this by allocating a page in

school journals, highlighting the service on school websites and literature such as first year and transition year brochures as well as using Croke Park hours to develop the WSA to guidance.

6. School management and guidance counsellors should have regular meetings about the nature and volume of work which practitioners are undertaking. Together, they must implement a WSA which meets the needs of their schools and ensure that this functions effectively.

7. School management should endeavour to inform guidance counsellors of their intentions for the following year's service as early as possible before the summer holidays so that early planning and preparation can take place and practitioners are not placed under unnecessary pressure worrying about their allocation.

8. Practitioners must be conscious of taking on too much work and becoming overwhelmed. They must be realistic in terms of what they can achieve given the diminished and limited resources available to them. Furthermore, the DES and IGC need to provide a coordinated response for practitioners to deal with the increased workload and pressure they are experiencing in their jobs. While the IGC may provide workshops on self-care at localised branch level and the DES provides supervision sessions, a more formal mechanism is required to assist guidance counsellors who may be struggling with the restructured nature of their work.

6.4 Personal Learning

I came to this research study with my own preconceptions about the diminished level of value which the DES places on the work of post-primary guidance counsellors, as well as the struggle which the profession is going through since the Budget 2012 allocation removal. However, carrying out qualitative research on this topic has taught me to park my personal assumptions and hone in on participants' stories as these are the real focus of the investigation, not my thoughts, opinions or assumptions.

This research study has taught me about the power of observation and examination through a critical eye. In standing back to inspect the post-primary guidance counselling profession, I have learned to appreciate the significance of observation through qualitative research. This links with my personal beliefs about the power of one person's story, which I feel is more meaningful than figures and statistics.

The process of interviewing participants as part of this research has reinforced my pride in the work and dedication of post-primary guidance counsellors. Despite the negative impacts of the Budget 2012 allocation removal on their profession, the participants I met with demonstrated great resilience and endeavour to do their best every day for their students. I found this extremely admirable and am proud to be part of such a profession and community.

Finally, the process of undertaking this research study has strengthened my belief that the profession of post-primary guidance counselling requires and should endeavour to engage in more reflective research. There are many practitioners doing marvellous work in schools around the country, which I believe is not being communicated to the guidance community and other key stakeholders. I feel that the IGC should not wait until the next emergency to engage in greater levels of evidence-based research but instead should be carrying out regular investigations of the profession.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a conclusion to the research investigation by presenting a summary of the findings in the context of the original research aim and objectives. In addition, some strengths and limitations of the study were identified, while recommendations on the issues which emerged during the research were provided. Finally, the personal learning of the researcher during the process was discussed.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Subject Information Letter



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter

January 27th 2014

Title of research study: Worrying Times: An Investigation into the Ramifications of the Removal of the Ex-quota Allocation for Guidance Counselling in Seven Post-Primary Schools in the East of Ireland

Dear Guidance Counsellor

I am currently a student on the MA in Guidance Counselling with the Department of Education and Professional Studies, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies I must complete a research dissertation on a topic of interest to me and related to guidance counselling.

Having already assessed the impact of the removal of the ex-quota allocation for guidance counsellors in six post-primary schools in the East of Ireland, as part of my Graduate Diploma, I now intend to focus deeper on the two areas of professionalism and role clarity, as well as wellbeing, stress and burnout among practitioners. In order to collect the necessary information and provide insights on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a one-to-one interview with me in a location convenient to you. The duration of the interview will be approximately 45 – 60 minutes.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Transcripts will be prepared by a verified transcription service who has signed confidentiality forms. Interviews will be recorded and the data will be securely held according to UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through professional publication.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the name of the school and individual participants will not be used in the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please feel free to contact my Supervisor or me:

Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne Student Name: Brian Connor

Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie Email: 09000540@studentmail.ul.ie

Yours sincerely

Brian Connor

This study has been approved by the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact The EHS Research Ethics Contact Point of the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Room E1003, University of Limerick, Limerick. Tel (061) 234101 / Email: ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Participant Consent Form

Date:

Title of research study: Worrying Times: An Investigation into the Ramifications of the Removal of the Ex-quota Allocation for Guidance Counselling in Seven Post-Primary Schools in the East of Ireland

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the schools will not be revealed at any stage in the reporting to the research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contributions are:

- Participation is entirely voluntary
- Participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process and any contributions made will be subsequently destroyed.
- The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the research supervisor. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research dissertation, but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included.

I hereby agree to take part in the research study being carried out by Brian Connor.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Researcher' Name: _____

Appendix C: Interview Framework



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Interview Framework

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I would like to talk to you about your experiences and opinions relating to the impact of the removal of the ex-quota allocation for guidance counsellors, specifically the two areas of professionalism and role clarity, as well as stress, burnout and wellbeing among practitioners.

The interview should last between forty-five minutes and one hour. While I may take some notes during the session, the session will be recorded. As we are being recorded, please ensure that you speak clearly so that I do not miss any of your comments.

All responses will be kept confidential, which means that your interview responses will only be shared between my research supervisor and me. I will ensure that any information included in the final dissertation does not identify the participants. Please remember that you do not have to talk about anything you do not want to and you may end the interview at any time. Are there any questions about what I have just explained? If not, then we will begin.

1. Which type of school best describes your school?

- Vocational/Community college ____
- Community/Comprehensive school ____
- Voluntary secondary school ____
- Fee paying secondary school ____

2. How many students are enrolled in your school?
3. How many qualified guidance counsellors are working in your school at present?
4. How many guidance hours did you have before the 2012 allocation removal?
5. How many do you have now?
6. According to section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, “a school shall use its available resources to ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance”. From your experience, how would you define ‘appropriate’ guidance?
7. Do you feel the 2012 allocation removal has affected your ability to deliver ‘appropriate’ guidance counselling and provide the services that students need?
8. If so, what services do feel have been affected and how?

If no, skip to question 13.

9. On which year groups is emphasis being placed, if any? Which year groups are you seeing less of now?
10. How do you think practitioners are managing to provide a service they are happy with, since the 2012 allocation removal?
11. Are you happy with the service that you can provide?
12. Have you any concerns for students in light of the new system that you are working under?
13. Is there a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in your school?
14. Has this approach been of much use in providing students with an adequate service?
15. What are your thoughts on the role of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools and how clearly this role is defined?
16. Do the expectations of what the service can deliver match the remit of practitioners?
17. Do you consider guidance counselling to be a profession?
18. Do you think students, parents and fellow teachers view it as a profession? Do you think these groups value the service that is provided?

19. Do you think other guidance counsellors consider it a profession?
20. Do you think practitioners feel that their work is important and valued?
21. How do you think this perception of their work and the value it brings affect how they perform their work?
22. How would you describe your personal workload in light of the 2012 allocation removal?
23. Given that you have worked in a particular system for a number of years, how do you feel about the changed nature of your work since the 2012 allocation removal?
24. How are you coping personally?
25. How do you manage your personal well-being?
26. Are you attending CPD and supervision sessions/days?
27. Do you feel that there have been supports from external sources (e.g. IGC, NCGE, ASTI, etc.) for you and other guidance counsellors?
28. Have you any suggestions about what can be done to help guidance counsellors and the services they provide to students?
29. Are there any other comments that would like to add?

I would like to thank you for your time. It has been most informative. In the coming weeks I will be analysing the data that you and other guidance counsellors have provided. I will be more than happy to email you a copy of the final dissertation on completion. Thank you for your time.

Appendix D: Map of Issues and Overarching Themes

Issues

1. Guidance hours
2. Defining 'appropriate' guidance
3. Ability to deliver 'appropriate' guidance
4. Emphasis on years / Year groups losing out
5. Satisfaction with the service they provide
6. Concerns for students
7. WSA to guidance
8. Definition and role of guidance counsellors – literature
9. Stakeholders' expectations / opinions of the service
10. Stakeholders' expectations – remit of practitioners
11. Guidance counselling as a profession
12. Value of the work/service
13. Workload since 2012
14. Personal wellbeing
15. CPD and supervision
16. Suggestions for the future

Overarching Themes

1. Role of Guidance Counsellors in the Post-Primary Sector Since Budget 2012
2. Stakeholders' Attitudes Towards Post-Primary Guidance Counselling
3. Wellbeing Amongst Guidance Counsellors in 2014