An Exploration into the Phenomenon of ICT in Post-Primary Education and its Potential to Enhance the Delivery of the Career Guidance Service in a Post-Primary School.

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Declaration

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

Signature: _______________________________
Abstract

The overall aim for this research was to trace the phenomenon of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in Irish post-primary education and to examine the approach of Guidance Counsellors in their application of ICT in the delivery of the post-primary guidance service in their school. The basis for carrying out such research was to determine the best practices being employed by Guidance Counsellors in the delivery of their service in post-primary schools.

Although a similar study was undertaken by Patton (2015) this study addresses a gap in research on the integration of a blended learning approach into the guidance service in post primary schools.

A qualitative research design was employed in the collection of data for this thesis. Interviews were conducted at random with Guidance Counsellors currently working in post primary education.

The main themes that emerged in the findings highlighted: ICT as a focus for innovation, teaching and learning using ICT in the delivery of the guidance service: ringfencing of guidance hours: the potential of ICT to extending the boundaries of the school guidance service and the provision of ICT within Junior Cycle guidance.

The conclusions focused on Guidance Counsellors keenness to utilise any ICT programmes or resources available to them and their eagerness to up skill in ICT. Barriers to implementing ICT in the guidance service are also considered in the conclusion. Finally, recommendations are made to inform future policy, practice and research.
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGM</td>
<td>Annual General Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAO</td>
<td>Central Applications Office</td>
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<td>CEB</td>
<td>Curriculum and Examinations Board</td>
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<td>CESI</td>
<td>Computer Education Society of Ireland</td>
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<td>CEU</td>
<td>Council of the European Union</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous Professional Development</td>
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<td>DEIS</td>
<td>Delivery of Equal of Opportunity in Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE</td>
<td>Health Service Executive</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication Technology</td>
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<td>IGC</td>
<td>Institute of Guidance Counsellors</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCVP</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate Vocation Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCA</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate Applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMI</td>
<td>Labour Market Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</td>
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<td>NCGE</td>
<td>National Council for Guidance in Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCTE</td>
<td>The National Centre for Technology</td>
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<td>NGF</td>
<td>National Guidance Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGFR</td>
<td>National Guidance Forum Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICEC</td>
<td>National Institute for Career Education and Counselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFG</td>
<td>Programme for Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PISA</td>
<td>Programme for International Student Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>T.Y</td>
<td>Transition Year</td>
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction
This chapter will outline the context of the research study while presenting a justification for the research along with the aims and objectives of the study. This chapter will also put forward the researchers position in the study and the research methodology applied to this study. Finally, a plan of the thesis will be outlined in the concluding section of this chapter.

1.1 Context and Justification of the Research Study
This research aims to explore the phenomenon of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in post primary education in Ireland. Furthermore, this research aims to highlight the potential ICT may have to enhance the delivery of the career guidance service in post-primary education. This research also aims to highlight some of the best practices in the use of ICT by Guidance Counsellors in the delivery of their guidance service to inform and enhance future practice. Additionally, the barriers that Guidance Counsellors experience when trying to implement a blended learning approach to the guidance service is examined.

In Ireland, the post primary education provided to young people aims to be of a high quality, with comprehensive learning environments that will prepare students for both further education and the world of work (DES 2004, p.13). The students in our classroom today are very different to students ten and twenty years ago. They have been born into an age of technology and are ‘considered generally to be comfortable and able users’ (DES 2008, p3). With the advancements in technology the world is becoming an interconnected global network. The way in which we communicate and share information has undergone meaningful change in the past twenty years. This has impacted the way in which people access and utilise services, including that of the guidance counselling services. Bimrose et al. (2011) highlight the methods of facilitating people to make vocational choices from second level education has taken different forms over time namely; advice, coaching, counselling and guidance. To improve the careers services in England, Bimrose et al. (2010) advocate that ICT will need to be fully integrated into the
delivery of the careers services ‘to achieve more for less’ service while also increasing ‘the flexibility of services and enhance their quality’. With the removal of the ex-quota hours for guidance counselling in Budget 2012 many students are not receiving the essential supports necessary to allow them to achieve their full potential and to progress their educational goals due to an eroded service. The use of ICT has the potential to provide more for less as it brings the guidance service outside the walls of the classroom. Hooley (2012) states Guidance Counsellors can now make use of the internet to source and share information with students outside of the classroom. Furthermore, the internet can offer a wealth of resources for Guidance Counsellors to develop further into suitable material for their students.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of Research

1.2.1 Aims
Digital competence is one of eight key competences for lifelong learning at a European level. Ireland has taken on many initiatives to improve the digital competence of our students over the past sixteen years (DES 2008). As they recognise greater integration of ICT would engage this demographic (Bimrose et al 2010).

As a post primary teacher and a trainee guidance counsellor in a second level school that introduced iPads five years ago, we are now known as a ‘digital school’. The researcher is particularly interested in investigating the current situation of ICT in post primary schools in Ireland and the potential ICT has to enhancing the provision of the Guidance service within post primary education. Neary and Hutchinson (2011) argue the importance practitioner-researcher is to develop the professional practice of guidance counsellors (Hearne 2013). I hope my research will have a practical application to my day to day work as a Guidance Counsellor.

1.2.2 Objectives

1. Examine the history of Information Communication Technology in Post Primary education in Ireland.

2. Explore the barriers Guidance Counsellors experience in implementing ICT in the provision of the guidance service in post primary schools.
3. Gather the practises of Guidance Counsellors in relation to the use of ICT in the delivery of the guidance service through interviews.

4. Highlight any good practices with regard to the use of ICT in the delivery of the post primary guidance counselling service.

1.3 Researchers Position in the Study

It is important in all research that the positionality of the researcher is known to readers (Thomas 2009; Robson 2011). I am a trainee Guidance Counsellor and a post primary school teacher of English and Religion. The post primary school in which I work introduced ipads six years ago which gave me an insightful perspective on students, teachers and managements attitudes to ICT in an educational setting. ICT has come to form part of my teaching and my delivery of the guidance service within my school. From my own experience of ICT I feel that changes are constantly happening. New educational tools are becoming available every year and I feel that in order to avail of these Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is key. However, ICT CPD for Guidance Counsellors I have found limited.

Through the medium of interviews, I have collected my data. To eliminate any personal bias, I interviewed branch members of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC). Reflexivity was applied to all aspects of this research as my own experience of ICT in the guidance service influenced my research topic (Cohen et al., 2011). My personal interest in this topic is to highlight some of the best practices with the use of ICT in the guidance service to enhance service delivery. Furthermore, I hope my research will offer some new insights for theory and policy to enrich the guidance service in post primary schools in Ireland.

1.4 Research Methodology

Merriam (2009) suggests that researchers interested in ‘how people interpret their experience, construct their world and the meaning they place on their experiences’ is the underlying theory behind ‘a basic qualitative study’ (Merriam 2009, p.23). For this reason, I chose to engage in qualitative research as I hope to find out Guidance Counsellors experiences of using ICT within the guidance service in a post primary school setting. The interviews were constructed in a semi structured way to allow for greater scope when
probing interviewees on their response to questions. However, to keep the interviews on track a guideline set of questions was used. Data collected was then analysed using coding which gave rise to five main themes which can be found in the findings and discussion chapters. Throughout the application of the methodology the imperative issues of ethics, validity and reflexivity were applied to this research (Thomas 2009).

1.5 Plan of Thesis
The layout of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the thesis. It depicts the context within which the research came about and stipulates a justification for the study. The aims and objectives of the study are outlined along with the methodology applied in field research and data analysis. Furthermore, the researchers position is addressed.

Chapter 2: A contextual background to the study is provided through relevant literature. The literature review looks at the phenomenon of ICT in the post primary education system in Ireland and the integration of ICT into the guidance service in Ireland. It also addresses CPD for Guidance Counsellors in ICT and the barriers that Guidance Counsellors face when trying to implement ICT into their practice.

Chapter 3: The research design is presented the methodology chapter. The approaches used to for data collection and analysis are described along with the rationale for the research paradigm. Issues of reflexivity, ethics, reliability and validity are also addressed.

Chapter 4: The data analysis and findings put forward the analytical approach used and present the findings of the primary data collected. These finding are highlighted through many themes.

Chapter 5: The discussion is a critical explanation of the findings in the context of the literature provided in chapter one.

Chapter 6: The concluding chapter gives an overview of the findings while highlighting the strength and limitations of the study. It makes recommendations for future policy, practice and research in the field of ICT in the post primary guidance service.
1.6 Conclusion
This chapter has introduced the research topic and highlighted the researcher’s positionality in relation to the topic. The aims and objectives are outlined along with a plan of the thesis. The next chapter will outline and review relevant literature to the study.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

‘There is no sign of this immense technological and social revolution slowing down. Computers are becoming ever more sophisticated.’

(Abbott 2001)

Information and communications technology (ICT) is an accepted element in all our lives and has a central role to play in education. Since the late 1990’s Ireland has made considerable investments in ICT infrastructure in schools, and in training for teachers. However little national research existed until the publication of ‘ICT in Schools’, an inspectorates report, in 2008. This reported looked at the impact that the innovative technologies have had on post primary schools and particularly on teaching and learning. Since the appearance of the first Government policy on ICT in education in 1997, substantial investment has been made in ICT facilities and training in Irish post primary schools. Like other countries, Ireland’s debate about ICT in education concentrates on the possible impact of ICT on teaching and learning and on the measures that need to be adopted to ensure that the potential of ICT to enrich students’ learning experience is realised (DES 2008a). Abbott (2001) recognised the changing force of the internet; he claimed that ‘any vision of the future of education has to recognise new methods of accessing information and latest ways of relating to others’ (Abbott 2001, p.5). The researcher will present a background picture of the history of ICT in the Irish Education system and follow with a review of literature on current research on ICT in Education. Furthermore, the author will look specifically at the role of the Guidance Counsellor and the impact ICT has had on the guidance service in post primary schools in Ireland. Finally, the researcher will highlight the potential impact ICT has on improving the guidance service in post primary schools.
2.1 History of Information and Communication Technology in the Irish Education system and Guidance Counselling Service

‘Exploring the past, historical research can offer us an insight into how the present has come about.’

(Younie 2000)

The information revolution, which includes computing, the internet and mobile devices, has brought about extensive changes that its impact could surpass even the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg in the 15th century. Information and communications technology (ICT) is now recognised as an element in all our lives and has a central position in education.

In the summer of 1971 in Ireland, the Computer Education Society of Ireland (CESI) ran summer in-services for teachers with an interest in computer technologies. Early accounts from these in-services documented those attending as being more interested in ‘the modern technology than by educational considerations but, in general, teachers who got involved at this stage intended to teach Computer Science’ (Brady 1987, p.46). By the mid-seventies the CESI drew up and submitted its first curriculum to the Department of Education and Science (DES), to the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). By 1977 the first microcomputer arrived in Irish schools on the back of the CESI’s promotion of in-services and their draft curriculum. The DES introduced the ‘Computer Studies Module’ in 1980 for senior cycle students but cited that this ‘is only the beginning’ as a course in computer studies was to be introduced formally into the curriculum under recommendations of the Advisory Committee set up by the Minister of Education (DES 1980, p.51). Little was known about the benefits of computers in these initial stages. There were no goals to achieve by way of a syllabus nor was the outcomes of educational applications known yet the possible advantages of computers were already being felt (EU 1993).

By 1981 there were 600 computers in 800 schools, this increased to 22 computers per school by 1995 (McGarr 2009). The CESI had two main concerns in those early years of ICT training; firstly, to provide teachers with proper training facilities and secondly, to introduce ‘computer studies’ into the post primary curriculum (Oldham 2014). Computers studies was originally introduced as an option within the Leaving Certificate
Maths programme as the thinking behind it was that ‘everyone took Maths’ (CEIS 2008, p.1). At Intermediate Certificate level in 1985 a computer based subject was introduced, yet computer use still remained optional with up take largely depending on ‘teachers interest and school resources’ (Mc Garr 2008). Rinn (1983) observed the need for ‘a fully worked out and comprehensive and integrated national plan for computing in schools’ (p.25). In their 1993 synthesis report of New Information Technologies (NIT) in EU member states the European Commission classed most member states as ‘still being in a state of orientation’ with regards to the integration of NIT (EU 1993). Lower secondary schools in France remarked that ‘computing must be an education tool, not a subject of education” meaning computers must incorporated across the curriculum to give all students greater access to education not just access to keyboard skills and word processing soft wear (EU 1993).

From the 1990’s onwards the use of digital technologies in careers work gathered momentum. Watts (2001) classifies the development of ICT in guidance into four periods, namely;

1. The mainframe phase (1960’s to late 1970’s) which saw the development of computer aided guidance systems. Unfortunately, due to the cost of interacting with a computer these systems were unsuccessful.

2. The microcomputer phase (1980’s to mid-1990’s) saw the demand for software packages for guidance services grow due to the microcomputer becoming more readily available and cost effective.

3. The web phase (1990’s to early 2000’s) observed guidance services developing their own websites to increase access for service users.

4. The digital phase (current) has enhanced the access people have to information and resources. For career practitioners, their service has been expanded through video, audio and text.

(Watts 2001, pp.3-4)

However, it took until 1990’s for career practitioners to make use of the internet as it was becoming a place where people wanted to investigate their ‘career thinking and development’ (Reid 2016, p.223). This required both guidance counsellors and students
to develop their digital career literacy in order to make the most of this new online environment (Hooley cited in NICEC 2012, p.3).

Mulkeen’s (1997) study of ‘IT-rich schools’ in the Dublin area found that in many schools the provision of IT was down to the teacher who expressed a keen interest in IT rather than it being an interest of the whole school. However, the potential of the internet for use in careers work was recognised from its early days by guidance practitioners (Hooley 2010). Mulkeen (1997) cited the need once again for a national policy.

Finally, work of the CESI came to realisation with the first Government policy on ICT in Education in Ireland coming in 1997. The DES finally prioritised ICT use in education with the publication in November 1997 of the Schools IT2000 program. One of the core aims of this programme was to support teachers ‘to develop and renew professional skills which will enable them to utilise ICT as part of the learning environment of the school’ something that was a priority of the CEIS in the 1990’s (DES 1997, p.2).

The Blueprint for the Future of ICT in Irish Education (NCTE 2001) strengthened and reaffirmed the ambitious policy outlined in the Schools IT2000 document. The expansion of access to and use of Internet technologies in schools and the introduction of broadband access to the internet was one of the principles underpinning the initiative. In addition, teaching skills were to be further developed to ‘fully integrate ICT into teaching and learning’ (NCTE 2001, p.4). Yet, Monaghan (2006) reported there being little or no investment in software and hardware in schools since 2002, which he described as ‘a lifetime in terms of technology’ (Monaghan 2006). The period from 2002 to 2008 saw a substantial decline in investment in ICT and ICT activity in schools (Mc Garr 2009). The problem was that although many schools now had access to broadband, their computers were now out of date and too slow to make use of this new high-speed broadband.

The National Centre for Technology (NCTE) is an agency of the DES which helps to manage the implementation of the Department ‘s ICT in Schools policy. The mission of which is to ‘promote and support the use of ICT by teachers and students in their daily teaching and learning’ (NCTE 2008, p.5). For guidance practitioner’s ICT had begun to enhance the delivery of their service. By utilising the internet for careers and further education information, offering ‘automated interactions’ and using the internet as a
means of communication the guidance service was brought firmly into the ‘digital phase’ (Hooley 2012).

This year, 2017, Minster Burton announced further funding in which to support the development and implementation of an eLearning Plan for each school to embed ICT in teaching and learning (DES 2017). He believes

“No matter what career a young person contemplates, there is one thing for sure, digital technology is revolutionising it. We can already see the agents of change – cloud, mobile, social and the internet of things.”

(DES 2017)

2.2 Rationale for using ICT in the guidance service in Post-Primary Education

“We want an education and training system that provides all learners with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in society and the economy’.

(Ó Foghlú 2015)

In the past, most guidance services have been framed around one-to-one careers and counselling interviews. Watts (2001) discussed how this approach is now replaced by a range of interventions, namely;

- Curriculum programmes
- Group work
- ICT based resources

With a focus on ICT, Hooley et al. (2010) highlight that the internet can be used in many ways by career practitioners to:

1. deliver information
2. provide an automated interaction
3. provide a channel for communication.

The objective of the guidance service in post primary schools in Ireland is to ‘assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their future’ (DES 2005, p.4). The use of ICT in the guidance service
encourages young people to become more autonomous and better informed about the
decisions they make about their future. Reid (2016) described the use of ICT as
improving young people’s motivation to engage in career thinking while also reinforcing
their interaction with the service.

The quantity of careers information available online is vast, readily available and has the
potential to remove the need career information in the form of books and leaflets (Reid
2016). ICT has the potential to include ‘interactive material that has a wider appeal to a
wider audience’ (Reid 2016, p.226). Which in turn would make a more accessible and
efficient service for career practitioners.

2.3 Irish Policy for Technology in Education

‘School systems need to find more effective ways to integrate technology into teaching
and learning to provide educators with learning environments that support 21st century
pedagogies and provide children with the 21st century skills they need to succeed in
tomorrow’s world’

(OECD 2015b)

There has been an increased emphasis on Information and Communication Technologies
(ICTs) in education policies since the mid 1990’s, in particular those of developed
countries. In Ireland, there have been several specific initiatives supported by
Government expenditure to encourage the use of ICTs in schools.

The ICT Schools IT2000 initiative introduced by the Irish government at the dawn of the
21st century recognised the lack of ICT integration within post primary schools in Ireland.
The initiative saw the Irish Government invest £40 million into the development of
internet access for all schools along with access to research networks (NCTE 2001). Not
only did the IT2000 initiative seek to boost school infrastructure but it also sought to
support teachers by upskilling or helping them develop skills to integrate ICT into their
teaching (DES 1997). Quality ICT infrastructure is the key to the success of ICT
implementation in schools (DES 2008). Following the implementation of ‘IT 2000’
NCTE (2001) found that schools had; increased availability and use of technology,
teacher CPD in ICT use was provided, both public and private partnerships were
established along with follow up ICT support mechanisms.
Blueprint for the Future of ICT in Irish Education (2001) saw the Irish Government invest further funds into developing and promoting ICT in both primary and post primary schools. By doing this the Government recognised the need for both students and teachers to continue upskilling in order for them to remain ‘at the cutting edge of international innovation and development in ICT’ (NCTE 2001, p.2). The Programme for Government (PFG) is a document published by the current Government in Ireland in which it puts forward its intentions to ‘address urgent priorities and engage in long term planning’ to benefit the people of Ireland and its economy (Government of Ireland 2016, p.3). Within this plan the Government have outlined their commitment to the ‘Digital strategy for Schools Plan’ (2015-2020) which seeks to incorporate ICT into all teaching and learning across the curriculum. This strategy is crucial to the future of Ireland’s education system for our students to ‘live work and learn in the twenty first century’ (Butler et al. 2013, p.2). This would see an increase in online lessons, which would hope to educate young people in ICT and further their digital skills (Department of the Taoiseach 2016). ICT is viewed as having an essential role in providing ‘a better and more effective’ educational service to young people today (DES 2015, p.20). The ‘Digital Strategy Plan’ proposes that the integration of ICT should be a concern for all stakeholders in the Irish education system and is something that is essential in providing a ‘high quality 21st century education’ (DES 2015, p.5).

With all these plans and policies, it is clear that the Irish education system has incorporated technology as a way of expanding access to knowledge. However, to provide continued support for students and educators in the integration of ICT into learning and teaching the DES need to recognise that there are many aspects that incorporating ICT in education. Some of these considerations include; teacher proficiencies and enthusiasm, ‘learning materials ICT equipment, and student motivation’ (UNESCO 2011). In 2009 the OECD published a report known as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in which it defined reading literacy as ‘understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, develop one’s knowledge and potential, and participate in society’. Since then this definition now incorporates both digital and print data.

In 2013 the DES published a report on ‘Digital Literacy’ in Irish post primary schools. This report summarised findings which were based on 144 second level schools in Ireland.
on their student print and digital literacy skills in comparison to other OECD schools (DES, 2013 p4). The report found Irish students were significantly below OECD average for engaging in ‘school-related computer activities’ at outside of school (DES 2013, p.4).

2.4 The role of the Guidance Counselling service in Post Primary schools

‘Effective guidance provision is also considered to play a key role in promoting social inclusion, equality, and active citizenship by encouraging and supporting individuals’ participation in education and training and in assisting them to attain self-fulfilment’.

(NGFR 2007)

Before exploring the role of ICT within the Post Primary guidance counselling service, it is necessary to examine the role of the Guidance Counsellor in Post Primary schools. Guidance counselling was first introduced in 1966 in Irish post-primary schools. Schools were allocated hours for a guidance counsellor based on their student numbers. In 1972 all schools with 250+ students were allocated their guidance provision on an ex-quota basis, this increased to 500 in 1983 (Hearne et al. 2016a). Schools that found themselves with between 250 and 499 students were allocated a half ex-quota post. Irish policies on guidance counselling have been influenced by the practice of both the American and UK systems as well as the requirements of Section 9(c) of the Education Act, 1998. Post primary schools are required to ‘ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices’ (DES 2005).

Hearne et al. (2016a) cite ‘misunderstandings’ that have arisen over defining guidance practice. The OECD (2004) define career guidance as helping people of any age “to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers” (OECD 2004, p.19). For comparison, the definition from the Council of the European Union(CEU) (2008) in which they cite guidance as encompassing many activities including “information giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills” (CEU 2008, p.3). In Ireland, the delivery of the guidance service is rooted in a holistic approach that incorporates personal and social, educational and vocational dimensions (NCGE 2004). The DES (2005) recognise guidance in post primary schools as
‘a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental sequence, that assist students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the three separate, yet interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance.’

(DES 2005, p.4)

According to the National Guidance Forum (NGF), ‘quality graduates’ have a key role to play in the delivery of an effective guidance service. Although guidance counselling is not a curricular subject the NGF report, published in 2007, suggested that to achieve an effective guidance service, training and qualification requirements for all those working in guidance counselling are extremely important. Therefore within the Irish education system ‘a person being assigned as guidance counsellor must be a qualified second-level teacher and, in addition, hold the relevant recognised qualification for school guidance work’ (DES 2012). The guidance counsellor has a significant role within the Irish education system as they engage in personal, educational, and vocational development of both young and adult learners throughout the lifespan and at circumstances of their life (IGC 1998). There are seven areas, which the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) highlights, that all guidance counsellors must be competent in:
The allocation system for schools to provide their students with ‘appropriate access to guidance’ remained in place until Budget 2012. The guidance service in post primary schools became severely eroded by a Government decision after the 2012 Budget to no longer ringfence the hours for guidance provision in post primary schools but instead leave the allocation of hours to the discretion of the school management. As a result of that measure, principals have to provide guidance and counselling from within their standard teaching hours allocation. This has led to a disjointed service, with a small number of schools employing no guidance counsellor. Harkin (2015) reported a ‘newly emerging picture’ of the guidance service as ‘one of a gradual dismantling of one of the most important professional supports available to students’ at a time when many students are at their most vulnerable and in need of support and guidance with decisions that may affect their future education and careers.
However, Harkin’s (2015) research into the impacts of the 2012 Budget cuts to the guidance counselling service reports that this is not the case for the guidance service in all post primary schools. His research found ‘a diversified model of school guidance had developed across schools as a result of school’s principals regarding the relative importance of a guidance counselling service in their schools’ (Harkin 2015). Furthermore, in their research Hearne et al. (2014) brought to light some ‘general observations’ made by regular teachers with regards to their school’s guidance service. The researchers noted that regular teachers highlighted that the guidance service was ‘already under pressure to deliver a whole school approach to guidance counselling’. A whole school approach involves collaboration between many departments namely: guidance counsellors, school management, teachers and resource staff. However, it is the guidance counsellor’s responsibility for guidance planning and provision of the service in the school (DES 2009). McLaughlin (2016) considers the guidance counselling service in second level schools ‘in its worst state in the history of education in this country’ (p.154).
2.5 ICT within the Post-Primary guidance counselling service in Ireland

‘Careers work is highly variable in nature; the key challenge is to develop a strategy to incentivise career professionals and managers to change their practice by integrating ICT’

(Bimrose et al. 2011)

Kidd (2006) described computers as ‘a powerful resource to expand and improve the quality of career counselling’ (Kidd 2006, p.124). A blended approach to guidance counselling involves incorporating Information Communication Technology (ICT) into the three interconnected strands of personal, educational and vocational aspects of guidance counselling. Blended teaching helps many teachers find an approach to teaching that is more engaging for present generation by using online tools and resources that many students may already be making use of (Pape 2010). Developments in technology offer the possibility to develop greater self-directed learning and encourage students to seek out information for themselves and reflect on their learning (MacDonald 2008). Thorne (2003) suggests blended learning is the most ‘logical and natural evolution’ of our learning. Blended learning offers the chance for educators to incorporate online learning into their teaching alongside the traditional methods of class and individual instruction.

According to Bimrose et al. (2010) ICT can be utilised in many ways in guidance counselling, such as a resource or as a medium for communication. Resources may include software programmes such as Reach+ and Classroom Guidance, college websites, labour market information, career investigations and so much more. Labour Market Information (LMI) refers to any information that relates to the operation of markets for learning, skills employment and how it relates to the wider economy as well as supply and demand of labour (Bimrose et al. 2010, p.15). ICT can be extremely useful for guidance counsellors to disseminate information about LMI for both students and parents. As a source of communication, ICT allows Guidance Counsellors, students and parents to engage in webchat, social media correspondence and videos of college courses or careers.

The largest National Career guidance website in Ireland is CareersPortal.ie. This was launched in 2008 under recommendation from the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.
Guidance Counsellors accessing this site have up to date career and further education information. The site is endorsed by both public and private organisations and is considered ‘an integral tool for guidance professionals throughout the country’ (Careers Portal 2017). For students, the website contributes to their vocational and educational preparation for their future. They gain skills in researching college courses and the world of work while also giving them an opportunity to find out more about themselves through interest and personality tests. REACH+ is another online guidance programme in use in Irish schools. This site uses a blended approach to learning about careers as students can use either their workbook or their online career file on the CareersPortal website.

Enabling students to use directly the extensive range of guidance tools available through the internet from relevant websites ‘optimise the delivery of personal, educational, career and vocational guidance in class group settings’ (DES 2012). Furthermore, reinforcing section 9c of the Education Act 1997 to “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices”. Appropriate access to guidance is now considered to include ICT for parents and the students themselves to find out as much as possible about the further education and career options available to them. O’Leary (2011) also highlights there ‘has been a seismic shift in the delivery of guidance and counselling in our secondary schools because the needs of students in modern Ireland have changed irrevocably’.

In 2009, the Department of Education published a report entitled ‘Looking at Guidance’. Within this report, the inspectorate found an increased usage of ICT amongst Guidance Counsellors as they considered it ‘a tool associated with their work’. Furthermore, the report found that ninety percent of students surveyed, at the time, reported feeling ‘competent’ to use ICT to retrieve information about ‘college courses, training and careers’ (DES 2009, p.47). Jenny Bimrose, a professor at the University of Warwick, has published extensively on supporting career guidance practitioners with the use of ICT in the delivery of the career guidance service. Bimrose along with fellow researcher Barnes highlighted how the level of integration of ICT in schools affects how ICT can be integrated into the guidance service (Bimrose et al. 2015). Cogoi (2005) claimed there is a need for guidance counsellors to develop competences in using ICT as a resource and to communicate with clients.
2.6 International Uses of ICT in Guidance

2.6.1 Greece
In Greece, a lifelong career development portal has been established to provide career development opportunities to young people, adults and guidance practitioners. This digital folder allows people of all ages to record their skills with applicability to the labour market. For young people, the government have developed a special section on ‘how to develop Career Management Skills’ which include ‘interactive CMS activities and CMS learning material’ (Euroguidance 2015, p.12).

2.6.2 Finland
In Finland ICT has been recognised as a key element of the career guidance services. Applications of ICT range from information files and telephone support to a career guidance system supported by computers, distance counselling and social media sites that facilitate interaction among practitioners and clients (Kettunen et al. 2014). According to Kettunen et al. (2015), career practitioners vary in their application of ICT in the delivery of career services. However, the use of social media in guidance is becoming more prevalent in Finnish Guidance services. These interactive working spaces are bring guidance beyond the realms of tradition guidance settings.

2.6.3 England
In England schools have a statutory responsibility to provide career guidance for students (Department For Education 2017). The UK’s Department for Education (2017) believe ‘online tools can offer imaginative and engaging ways to encourage young people to think about the opportunities available to them’ (p.5). Furthermore, young people aged from 11-19 are supported in England by 150 local authorities with information, advice and guidance (IAG) services. As well as having access to guidance counsellors in schools. Large bodies for research have been carried out to investigate the potential ICT has in the delivery of careers services (Barnes and La Gro 2009; Bimrose et al. 2011; Bimrose et al. 2014). Government policies regarding the use of ICT in guidance for young people has been supportive. Barnes (2008) found that the enhanced use of ICT unlocks the possibility of 24/7 delivery of some services.
2.6.4 Denmark
Since 1994 Denmark has seen a steady growth in the use of ICT in its secondary schools. In 2000, 98 percent of Danish students used a computer during the final school leaving written exam. Bertel Haader, Denmark’s minister for education, believes ‘the internet is indispensable, including in the exam situation. Our exams reflect daily life in the classroom which must reflect daily life in society’ (Haader cited in NOEWIN 2009). It is no surprise that the country has developed a national e-guidance portal ‘www.ug.dk’ primarily for young people and their parents, while also offering information for adults. This comprises ‘of virtual communication and guidance tools, such as phone, online chat, webcam, text messages and e-mail’ (Plant and Thomsen 2012, p.7).

2.7 Conclusion
The literature review has explored the history of ICT in post primary education in Ireland and the policies that has enhanced its establishment in the Irish education system over the past twenty years. The Digital Strategy for Schools highlights the government’s commitment to recognising the potential of digital technologies to transform the learning experiences of students today. An intergrated approach to the guidance counselling service, where ICT is incorporated into classroom guidance seems, from the literature to be the way forward to cater for a current cohort of ‘digital natives’ within Irish post primary schools. Yet, with severe cutbacks to the service in Budget 2012 the guidance service has been left undermined and under increasing pressure to meet the personal, vocational and educational needs of these students. The DES (DES 2013) highlights the importance of the guidance counsellor in promoting positive mental health and wellbeing initiatives, yet they do so at a time when resources have been considerably diminished. In researching guidance counsellors attitude towards the use of ICT in their practice the researcher hopes to provide a solid contextualisation within which to frame this study.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

‘Educational studies are a practical science in the sense that we do not only want to know facts and understand relations for the sake of knowledge, we want to know and understand to be able to act ‘better’ than we did before.’

(Langeveld 1965)

The purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in post primary education in Ireland. A qualitative method was adopted using interviews to highlight the impact the ICT phenomenon has had on the guidance service in post primary schools. The researcher’s previously mentioned experience of being a trainee Guidance Counsellor in an iPad school sparked an interest on the impact ICT has had on the guidance service in a post primary setting and furthermore, the possibilities Guidance Counsellors feel that ICT has to improving the delivery of their service.

3.1 Identification of Research Question

Before a research methodology is chosen it is important to identify a number of important questions that address the topic being researched (Merriam 2009). This formulation of research questions is often cited as the most challenging part for the research design (Bryman 2007).

3.1.1 Primary Research Question

From exploring the available literature and research topic the primary research question of this qualitative study is: ‘what potential does Information Communication Technologies (ICT) hold to enhancing the delivery of the guidance service in post primary schools in Ireland?’ This research involved an investigation into the advancement of ICT in the post primary education service in Ireland and how these advancements have impacted the guidance service in post primary schools. As the guidance activities can be highly variable, further investigation was carried out to
highlight best practises with the use of ICT in these guidance activities. As a result, a number of secondary research questions were formulated to address additional areas that became apparent.

3.1.2 Secondary Research Question
The key questions are:

1. What are the benefits of using ICT in post primary schools?

2. What is the attitude of Guidance Counsellors towards the use of ICT in the Guidance Counselling service in a post primary school?

3. How is ICT currently being used in the delivery of the Guidance and Counselling service in post Primary schools in Ireland?

4. What are the barriers to implementing ICT within the guidance counselling service in a Post Primary school?

As Guidance Counsellor’s experience was key to this research, the methodological approach to be selected was given careful consideration.

3.2 Methodology and Methods
The function of research, as observed by Khan (2008), is to enhance existing facts by adding the latest information. Research methodology studies the steps taken by a researcher to solve a research problem, along with the logic behind these steps (Kumar 2008).

To acquire information, research must be carried out by ‘a proper method rather than an improvised method’ (Khan 2008, p.97). Research methods is understood as the techniques used for conducting research. It is important that researchers consider the rationality behind their chosen method of research (Robson 2011). Therefore, it is imperative a researcher considers the methodology of solving the research question along with the method to acquiring the information needed to solve the research question.
3.3 Research Paradigm

‘your method of research should reflect what you are trying to find out’

(Silverman 2010)

3.3.1 Definition of Research Paradigms
A paradigm is described by Thomas (2009) as a way of researching phenomenon through a model or pattern. There are two main types of research approaches in guidance counselling and education, namely

- a positivist approach which is a quantitative approach to research and
- an interpretivist approach which is a qualitative approach to research

(Cohen et al. 2011)

Paradigms guide the researcher decision on how to carry out research while also providing researchers with ways of looking at the social world. The research topic involved exploring the impact ICT has made on the delivery of the guidance service in post primary schools therefore, this study is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm in order to collect quality data.

A qualitative research approach was chosen over a quantitative approach because the researcher felt that it would be more beneficial to ascertain multiple views from each of participants in the study (Thomas 2009). The researcher did consider questionnaires as a means of gathering information from the sample population. Cohen et al. (2011) stipulate that questionnaires allow for the gathering of a large amount of data, both quickly and cheaply. However, the main drawback is that significant care must be taken when designing the questionnaire, as there is a limit to the amount of questions that can be asked. The researcher wanted the investigation to reflect the experience of Guidance Counsellors in the field and to have their voice and experiences echoed throughout the research findings. The researcher also wanted to avoid closed questions which as stated by Cohen et al. (2008) are the trademarks of quantitative data.

Robson (2011) describes qualitative research as a social investigation with a focus on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences. Qualitative research is a ‘broad approach to the study of social phenomena’ (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p.3). This allows qualitative research to pay special attention to the “qualities” of experience and aspects of life that quantitative approaches typically gloss over. Through the interactions
between people, qualitative research is concerned with researching specific meanings, emotions, and practices. Merriam (2009) suggests that researchers interested in ‘how people interpret their experience, construct their world and the meaning they place on their experiences’ is the underlying theory behind ‘a basic qualitative study’ (p.23). Again, this is another reason why the researcher chose to engage in qualitative research to ascertain the Guidance Counsellors experiences of using ICT within the guidance service in a post primary school setting. Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1996) maintain that qualitative researchers ‘attempt to understand behaviour and institutions by getting to know the persons involved’. This captures the concept that qualitative research tries to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Khan 2008). Hence the researchers endeavour to make sense of the phenomenon of ICT in post Primary education and its impact of the guidance service.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

Several data collection methods were considered while reviewing the extensive literature on this topic. Ultimately the scope of data collection was influenced by the amount of time available to complete the study. Bell (2008) outlines many limitations which also influence a research approach, namely:

- Travelling distances
- Willingness of Guidance Counsellors to take part
- Opportunity to meet respondents
- Time restraints of the school day

Many primary sources of data were considered for the collection of data for this research:

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Diary entries
- Portfolios
- Focus Groups
- Observations
- Case studies

(Thomas 2009; Bell 2008)
3.5 Questionnaires- Advantages and Disadvantages
The questionnaire is the most commonly used instrument with which to procure information in research. The advantages of using a questionnaire to gather information are as followings:

- Requires less input from the researcher
- Not time consuming on the participants part
- Exerts less social pressure, which allows participants to reflect on questions asked
- The impersonal nature allows participants to be completely honest

(Thomas 2009)

As previously highlighted questionnaires allow for a large amount of data to be gathered quickly and cheaply. Furthermore, information acquired is often straightforward to analyse (Cohen 2008). However, there were disadvantages to questionnaires, namely:

- Misinterpretation of questions due to poor design or ambiguous language
- Little interested in the topic being researched may evoke a smaller response rate
- Response rate may be low due to questionnaire fatigue
- Questions may be closed and limited
- Participants may require further explanation to questions
- Participants may ignore questions

As the researcher wished to highlight the experience of Guidance Counsellors in the field and with questionnaires vulnerable to a low response rate and limiting in allowing any in-depth exploration of attitudes and perceptions a qualitative research method was adopted.

3.6 Interviews- Advantages and Disadvantages
Cohen et al. (2008) described the interview as ‘a flexible tool’ used in data collection for both verbal and non-verbal data. Patton (1990) argues the benefit of using an interview allows the researcher ‘enter into the other persons prespective’ (p.278). There are a number of ways to conduct an interview; one-to-one interviews, focus groups, group interviews, telephone interviews and semi structured interviews. Each of these have their strengths and limitations which were explored before deciding on an interview technique which was considered to yeild the best results for this research.
Table 1: Strengths and limitations of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Limitation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fully structured interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> Administered easily and quickly</td>
<td> Pre-determined questions used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> Straightforward coding</td>
<td> No opportunity to follow up signals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstructured interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> Participants tell you the issues</td>
<td> Easy to go of track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> Highlight and area not previously considered</td>
<td> Interviewees set agenda, danger of interview becoming a counselling session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi structured interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> Flexibility to adapt to issues that arise</td>
<td> Interview may lose track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> Considerable freedom in sequencing questions</td>
<td> Time can be hard to manage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Thomas 2009; Robson 2011)

Robson (2011) believes ‘face to face interviews offer the possiblity of modifying ones line of enquirey, following up with with interesting responses and investigating underlying motives’ (p. 280). It also allows the research to witness not verbal cues that may be informative to their research.

3.7 Accessing the Sample

The sample of participants selected were comprised of Guidance Counsellors in the Midlands area who were working as Guidance Counsellors in the post primary sector. As ethical approval for this reaseacher was granted at a busy time for Guidance Counsellors the reseracher secured six interviews with guidance counsellors from different post primary sectors in Ireland, namely: voluntary secondary schools, community schools and comprehensive schools. All interviews were held at the conveince of the Guidance
Counsellors, namely their place of employment. Robson (2011) refers to the importance of location when conducting interviews given that interviewees may not feel at ease in certain locations.

3.8 Pilot Interview
A pilot interview took place in order to eliminate any issues that may arise. Merriam (2009) advocates the importance of piloting interviews as it allows researchers to refine their questions, improve their interviewing techniques and identify faulty equipment.

3.9 Design of Interview
A broad outline of the questions were sent to interviewees before the interviews took place. Interview questions were set out in a semi-structured way meaning the main part of the interview is directed by a guideline of questions but the order or wording of these questions changed during the course of the interview. This helped the interviewer relax during the course of the interview and worry about forgetting to ask certain vquestions. However, in spite of regulating the questions there was still no guarantee of controlling the interview (Cohen et al. 2007). Merriam (2009) states that such an approach to interviewing will give the researcher greater scope to respond ‘to the situation at hand’ and to the interviewees ‘worldview and ideas on the topic’ (Merriam 2009, p.90). Cohen et al. (2007) suggests that incorporating this approach would allow for spontaneity while still keeping structure and focus on the interview process.

The researcher was keen to highlight the unspoken experience of the Guidance Counsellor. Using the semi structured interview approach allowed the researcher to acquire information such as signs of evasiveness, hesitancy or even exhaustion in some cases which conveyed much that would not be found in written replies.
Data analysis is an extremely important aspect of all qualitative research. Transcribing is a vital step in the process of data collection from interviews. The researcher had to consider that there would be a possibility of ‘data loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity’, overall transcription will unavoidably lose data from the original encounter (Cohen et al. 2007, p.365). The constant comparative method highlighted by Thomas (2009) involves scrutinising your data repeatedly, comparing every aspect of the interview ‘phrase, sentence and paragraph’ against other data collected (Thomas 2009, p.198).

By applying this method of analysis, ‘themes or categories’, may emerge which may provide the bases to research. Bryman (2012) identified a theme as a category identified
through the data which ‘relates to research questions’ and can provide the basis of theoretical understanding of the data. These themes may also form a summary of the overall data, which the researcher collected. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as

‘an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society’.

(Braun and Clarke 2006, p.81)

Theme mapping following on from the constant comparative method, this a method of organising themes into sequential order and backing up the theme identified with a quote from transcripts (Thomas 2009). By using theme mapping, the researcher hoped to highlight the experience of the Guidance Counsellors in their use of ICT in the delivery of their service. The researcher used Braun and Clarke (2012) six phase design as a data analysis framework:

- Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data
- Phase 2: Generating initial codes
- Phase 3: Searching for themes
- Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes
- Phase 5: Defining and naming themes
- Phase 6: Producing the case report

3.11 Validity

Being able to trust results that research produces is extremely important however it is impractical to believe that all research is 100% valid. This is why all research must be carried out with rigor by ‘producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner’ (Merriam 2009, p.209). If a piece of research is invalid then it is deemed worthless. Researchers can take reasonable measures to ensure data collected is precise and truthful. Cohen et al. (2008) describes the following as means of ensuring data validity:
Participants approach

Objectivity of researcher

Reliability and range of data

As a trainee Guidance Counsellor, I am part of the world that I was researching therefore I was aware in the course of my research to recognise that I cannot take an objective stance and that my own experiences may offer insights into my research (Cohen et al. 2008).

Robson (2011) makes an interesting observation on the human use of language. He describes it as ‘intriguing both as a behaviour and for the unique window it opens on what lies behind our actions’ (Robson 2011, p.280). The interview process is subject to questions of validity as all interviews see ‘humans interacting with humans’ and it is unavoidable that the researcher will have an impact on the interviewee and in turn on the data (Cohen et al. 2008, p.150). This was an issue I considered that could impact the validity of the data I was collecting. However, face to face interviews off the possibility of adapting ones line of enquirey, following up on noteworthy responses and investigating body language in a way that other primary data sources, such as the questionnaire, fall short of (Robson, 2011). Furthermore it is also important to note that the researcher did not observe the Guidance Counsellors during a timetabled class nor in a one to one careers interview therefore what the Guidance Counsellor said they carried out in relation to the use of ICT would have to be taken as what they do in practise. To further strengthen the validity the researcher kept a reflective diary in order to improve the dependability of the research (Thomas 2009).

3.12 Reliability

Reliability was another feature of data collection that the researcher took into account when correlating the data from my interviews. Thomas (2009) recommends the researcher ensure that when collecting data ‘your instrument be consistent from one time to the next’ (Thomas 2009, p.104). The researcher ensured consistancy by having a guideline of questions for to follow during the course of the interview. This guideline of questions covered five areas, namely:
- Guidance Counsellors Competency in ICT
- Students Competency in ICT
- School in which the Guidance Service being delivered
- Issues with the use of ICT in delivery of guidance service
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Guidance Counsellors
- Recommendations

However, the researcher realised that human behaviour is never static which meant the guidance counselling practices of one professional will differ to another. Merriam (2009) explicitly states that personal accounts are not necessarily unreliable it is in the method of collection of these accounts where the reliability must lie. The way in which the data is collected must be ‘consistent and dependable’ (Merriam 2009, p.221).

3.13 Reflexivity

According to Finlay and Gough (2003) reflexivity is a process whereby the researchers must engage in critical self-reflection. This involves the researcher acknowledging the impact their background, social beliefs, behaviour and understanding impact the research process. The researcher was aware that the information disclosed to them during the interview would be open to their interpretation. Hence the researcher’s need to ensure that their interpretation in the findings and discussion chapters was as close as possible to what the Guidance Counsellors wanted to say.

Mc Leod (2010) advocates that it is important for researchers to describe their ‘professional background and allegiances, pre-existing assumptions and experience of doing the study’ (p.33). By doing so researchers are upfront and clear about any ‘potential sources’ of bias’s they may have (McLeod 2010, p.33). To address this issue of rigor re subjectivity and bias the researcher has clearly identified themselves as a trainee Guidance Counsellor in the field in which the research took place. Furthermore, the researcher has previously outlined their interest in ICT stemming from their employment in a school which uses iPads as educational tools.

Recognising the researcher’s worldview and background may influence how they construct and interpret the world, which may in turn have an influence on the way in which they pose questions and filter information gathered. A reflexive diary was utilised by the researcher from the beginning of the research process to the end. It was used to
record any feelings, ideas, conflicts or reactions experienced by the researcher throughout the research process.

3.14 Ethical Issues

“Ethics are principles of conduct about what is right and wrong. What is right for me may not be right for you. What is right for the researcher may not be right for the participant”

(Thomas 2013, p.38).

All forms of research are subject to ethical issues as they involve both gathering information ‘about people and from people’ (Punch 2005, p.276). How the researcher conducted herself and how she used the data collected are subject to important ethical considerations. There is extensive literature available that discuss the ethical issues that can arise during research. Ultimately however, ethical practice comes down to three levels of regulation, namely:

1. Legislative - requirements of UL’s EHS Ethics Committee
3. Personal - continuous ‘ethical reflexivity’ and keen discernment in decision-making throughout research process

(Cohen et al. 2007, Hearne 2016b)

Creswell (2007) details the challenging process involved in designing ethically sound qualitative research. The topics, which are researched, are often emotionally charged, close to people, and practical. In the process of studying these topics, open-ended research questions are used, allowing the researcher to listen to the participants who are facilitating the study.

As a trainee guidance counsellor, I adhered to the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) (2012) and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) (2008) codes of conduct in all aspects of my research. There are four key values of responsibility, competence, integrity and respect which informed this research project and furthermore served to protect participants and safeguard the reliability of this research (IGC 2012; NCGE 2008).
It is important to identify the three main areas where ethical issues arrive when conducting interviews; ‘informed consent, confidentiality and consequences of the interviews’ (Cohen et al. 2007, p.382). Keeping in mind that interviews are a social encounter the researcher tried to conduct each interview in a careful and sensitive manner to make the interviewee feel comfortable to answer questions with a genuineness with which they wish to express an experience. Hearne (2013) highlights a researcher’s duty of care to their participants by respecting their rights and dignity at all times.

There was also an ethical issue as to what can be used as data and what is to be excluded. For example, if an interviewee wishes to express an opinion ‘off the record’ I must facilitate this request as they are volunteering their time for this research (Cohen et al. 2008, p.362).

3.15 Conclusion
This chapter has outlined the methodological approach in the research design. Research questions were defined along with a discussion on how the researcher decided on an appropriate research paradigm. Issues of validity and reliability were examined, while considerations were also given to issues of reflexivity and ethical issues.
4.0 Introduction
In this chapter, the responses to the interviews are presented and examined. The findings presented within this study are based exclusively on the data from the interviews conducted by the researcher. This data is represented using discursive and written analysis.

4.1 Rationale to Findings
The findings are presented under the following headings:

4.2 Background to Interview
4.3 Summary of Participants
4.4 Teaching and Learning with ICT
4.5 Use of ICT in one to one Career Counselling
4.6 Computer Hardware
4.7 Skills and attitudes of Student to the use of ICT
4.8 Professional Development

4.2 Background to Interview
Having collected data using the methodology outlined in the previous chapter, the focus of the research then progressed to analysing this data and interpreting the findings to better understand the current position of ICT in the guidance service of post primary schools. Guidance Counsellors were chosen at random by the researcher to investigate the use of ICT in the guidance service in post-primary schools in Ireland.

4.3 Summary of Respondents
All Guidance Counsellors interviewed during this research held a qualification in Career Guidance from a recognised university in Ireland. Out of the six interviewees four were female and two were male. All interviewees were working in the post primary sector at
the time with either part or full-time guidance hours. The researcher was the interviewer on all occasions. The interview schedule was semi structured. Based on the answers given to these questions the interviewer used probing questions to elicit further opinions on individual issues. Quotations from interviewees have been embedded within the data analysis which follows, to illustrate issues raised by interviewees. A coding system was employed to ensure anonymity of interviewees. They are listed as Interviewees A to F. The data analysis which follows is going to be presented on a theme basis and relevant remarks from interviewees will serve to highlight areas analysed.

4.4 Teaching and Learning with ICT

From analysis of the data collected it obvious to the researcher that Guidance Counsellors consider access to ICT necessary to deliver a guidance service that meet the needs of the 21st century student in all post primary settings.

For one Guidance Counsellor insisting their students had a programme to follow and access to the computer room following the restoration of Guidance hours in their school was of paramount importance, otherwise they commented the effect would be ‘detrimental’ to the delivery of the guidance service.

Although the time of year generally dictates the Guidance activities for most Guidance Counsellors the use of the Reach+ programme was evident as popular choice for senior cycle students, Reach+ was described by interviewee C as ‘user friendly that can be tailor made for a class groups needs’. This programme contains four key components:

- The Workbook
- The Students Online Career File & Portfolio
- The School Administration
- The REACH+ Network Support and Training

The programme describes itself as an 'easy to use online management system that enables them to keep track of students' progress, and prepare and deliver classes using PowerPoints, videos and guidelines offered through lesson plans’ (Careers Portal 2017). The easy to use sentiment is echoed in the interviewees comments on the
programme which include ‘very user friendly….easy to use….with so many lessons and resources’. Reach+ is an integrated programme that uses classroom-based learning through student workbooks, combined with web-based learning through the Careers Portal website (Careers Portal 2017).

Most interviewees had introduced the Reach+ programme during Transition Year as it gave students ‘a base from which they can build’ for trying to decide on the progression route they wish to take when they finish school.

Having the online component of the package was useful for other Guidance activities which included:

- Parent teacher meetings
- Booking appointments
- One to one career interviews

Interviewee D reported using their students Reach+ file as the ‘bases for parent teacher meetings’. This Guidance Counsellor could use the information stored on their student’s online profiles to guide their meetings with parents when the occasion arose. Reach+ was highly praised by all interviewees for its structure 'it has a beginning, a middle and an end', something that Interviewees felt was needed to engage their students and to keep them interested. Interviewee D described introducing the online programme to their sixth years

‘once they saw what they could do a lot of it they bought into it and completed the exercises in their own time’.

Many interviewees describe being ‘pleasantly surprise’ by the number of students who complete the interactive activities in their own time. Having access to the computer room or students having their own device is only way to implement this resource. Further advocating this blended guidance resource, Interviewee E described it as:

‘really well laid out, if you are any way IT savvy, it is really easy to use’.

Interviewee C described having little access to a computer room with their senior cycle students. Therefore, for information to be disseminated to students the Guidance
Counsellor would regularly use ICT to deliver PowerPoints, play videos made available by college’s and ask guest speakers to attend their school. Using ICT this Guidance Counsellor was bridging the gap for students who didn’t have the timetabled Guidance class in the computer room to research this information themselves. ICT is clearly an integral part of this Guidance service as provisions have not been put in place for students to have access to computer rooms during Guidance classes.

Furthermore, for interviewee C working in a DEIS school requires supporting students a lot, especially when it comes to progression

‘the school is disadvantaged; therefore, the kids are disadvantaged and need a lot of support in terms of accessing opportunities after school’.

This Guidance Counsellor felt that the use of ICT in Guidance was a source of support to not only their guidance lessons but also in assisting students making informed decisions about their subject choices and progression routes after school.

Interviewee A suggested the use of Google classroom has worked well in their school with junior cycle students. This Guidance Counsellor is working in a school which introduced tablets instead of books in the classroom. The benefits to the Guidance service is

‘I have uploaded what I want students to look at on google classroom they merely log in and away they go’.

Google classroom is a platform where teachers can generate tasks, send announcements, communicate, and students can share resources with each other and interact in the class stream or by email. As time is often of the essence for Guidance Counsellors to get into junior cycle classes Guidance Counsellors can also quickly see who has or hasn't completed the work, and give real-time feedback to a student. Granted this platform requires access to the internet and a google email, it can be easily accessed on a smartphone, tablet or PC.

All interviewees reported using both their own PowerPoint presentations to disseminate information to class groups at both junior and senior cycle. There were many other popular online resources used on a weekly basis by both Guidance Counsellors and
students for sourcing information, finding resources or completing tasks in conjunction with an online programme. These were namely:

- www.Careers Portal.ie
- www.Qualifax.ie
- www.CAO.ie
- www.classroomguidance.ie
- www.apprenticeships.ie
- www.solas.ie
- College’s own websites
- The points calculator app

4.4.1 ICT and Junior Cycle Guidance

It is very clear to the researcher from organising a time for interviewees and analysing the data from the interviewees, Guidance Counsellors are under continuing time constraints to deliver a guidance service that meets the needs of their students. Access to Junior cycle classes for guidance activities remains limited in all interviewees experience. Interviewee C described both second and fifth year’s as ‘neglected the most’. As all interviewees experience no formal contact with Junior Cycle groups on the timetable and are therefore forced to ‘beg and borrow’ year groups from other timetabled classes at various times during the year to carry out guidance activities at Junior Cycle. Interviewee A highlighted the importance of a whole school approach to guidance

‘Time is a huge issue, that’s why the whole school approach is really, really important. You don’t want to be an isolated department. I am very reliant on non-exam classes to help me.’

These sentiments were also echoed by interviewee F who remarked ‘the religion teachers collected the money for me for the Higher Options in September, without their help it wouldn’t be possible to organise, I just don’t have the time’.

For interviewee D, they felt because of the lack of contact hours the most important thing was

‘to touch base with them (students) and make them aware there is a Guidance Counsellor in the school’.
Interviewees conveyed a desire for a more formal structure to Junior cycle guidance with Interviewee E stating they

‘hoped to push guidance lessons into the junior cycle with the new Wellbeing hours’

While interviewee B also expressed a desire to have a programme ‘perhaps six or seven lessons’ that were specific to guidance to make students to aware of the service in the school.

In most of cases Guidance Counsellors reported using their own PowerPoints to share information on subject choice for senior cycle with third and T.Y students. Interviewee B acknowledged how

‘I had planned on getting into first and second year classes, but time did not allow for it this year’.

The lack of time allotted to Junior Cycle guidance was a concern of all Guidance Counsellors interviewed for this research. With the best intentions to carry out some form of guidance activity with Junior Cycle students may Guidance Counsellors fell short on time with the majority reporting speaking to third years in the new year about subject choice for fifth year.

4.4.2 Social Media

Interviewee’s A, E and F have all engaged with social media by setting up their own school guidance counselling twitter page. Interviewee E described the reason behind it as an

‘easy way of getting into their (students) loop and the way they communicate’.

This Guidance Counsellor got their students to take out their phones during class, log onto twitter and follow the page. By doing this all the above-mentioned interviewees hope that their students will access more information from the Guidance service in a less formal way. Interviewee E found that since establishing a school guidance Facebook page their one to one requests for general information has reduced as students are accessing information they need through these social media sites

‘we are hoping that they will get to a maturity level where they will pass heed of it’.
4.5 Use of ICT in One to One Career Counselling

Following on from the classroom guidance activities many interviewees highlighted their use of ICT in one to one career counselling sessions with students. Interviewee E and F commented, that they ‘use it a lot in one to one’. Asking them to elaborate interviewees A, C, D and E highlighted the speed at which information could be found by downloading a college online prospectus or accessing one of the previously mentioned websites. Interviewee D observed that ‘increasingly I say go online to download the prospectus’, during a one to one meeting. By the Guidance Counsellor encouraging this, the responsibility for finding the material is with the student while the Guidance Counsellors helps them navigate through the information.

Preparing for a one to one career interview was also assisted by the information saved on Reach+ belonging to the student. Interviewee C stated:

‘one of the positive knock on effect of using the Reach+ programme is that it is great in one to one careers interviews, you log onto their profile and all their information is there, I can then log my meeting with them, rather than writing it out and putting it into a filing cabinet’.

The administrative aspect of the Reach+ programme was something highlighted by more than one interviewee. Interviewee E commented:

‘we only realised through training there was a facility to make appointments online-this gives them (the student) amenity and confidentiality, as well as saving time chasing down students’.

This facility on the Reach+ programme could ‘save us (Guidance Counsellors) a lot of time finding and recruiting students’. It also encourages students to take responsibility for their own future decisions and eliminates the excuse, as Interviewee C reflected ‘I couldn’t find you, you weren't in your office’.

As all the interviews carried out by the researcher took place at the convenience of the interviewee the researcher had an opportunity to see the setup of their Guidance office. All interviewees had their own office and in most cases had two computers, one for the Guidance Counsellor and one for the student during a one to one session.
Students themselves would often rely on ICT during a one to one session. Interviewee C remarked that they would often have students ‘take out their phone to show them their CAO form or to log into their CAO account’. Technology is clearly a part of the delivery of the guidance service today, Guidance Counsellors rely on it and students demand it.

4.5.1 Personal Counselling
All interviewees expressed exhaustion and frustration at how time poor their service has become. With an increased demand on personal counselling and lack of hours available for formal timetabling, one interviewee found themselves ‘using administrative time and after hours for one to one work’. Interviewee E described ‘a heavy demand on personal counselling which needed to be solution focused for their student’s due to time constraints’

Again, the effect of this see’s this interviewee spent:

‘two thirds of my timetable is spent one to one with students and one third is class room guidance with senior cycle’

Interviewee A commented that personal counselling ‘has become more common in the last year definitely, but the last couple of months’.

Interviewee F echoed the sentiments of A and E describing ‘the demand for personal counselling increasing every year’.

Interviews took place during the last month of the school term which may have seen an increase in stress and anxiety amongst students as state exams began to become a reality.
4.6 Computer Hardware

Access to the computer room was an issue for all Guidance counsellors at some point in their career. Interviewee D commented

‘every year it was hit and miss trying to book my place in there (the computer room), this year I insisted the Guidance classes be timetabled in the computer room’.

All interviewees, except for one, reported now having access to the computer room via a timetabling system. The one interviewee who is still experiencing issues having their Guidance classes prioritised for the computer room explained

‘I would have to approach management to make sure T.Y’s are timetabled for the computer room, they wouldn’t even think of it’.

Compared to others experience of managerial support, Interviewee E remarked:

‘our management are very good, they consulted with us and have given us priority for careers classes in the computer room’.

This need for support from management was a strong feature of many of the researchers interviews. Interviewee D commented:

‘that management needed to give me a demonstration of support, until I made a fuss about having access to the computer room…it was just a lip service’.

Another issue experienced by two interviewees was the curricular subject’s guidance classes were ‘backed against’ on the timetable. Interviewee B gave the example of ‘being backed against an LCVP class means little or no access to the computer room’.
As LCVP is a state exam subject priority was given to this class to complete the course for the terminal exam. Interviewee A described how a clash in their teaching subjects with a double sixth year Guidance class on Friday afternoons meant

‘she couldn’t be in two places at the one time, so I’m down for LCVP, which is not ideal as I only see each of the seven classes every seven weeks’.

As a result of having little time available for students Interviewee A recommends that

‘students go to an external Guidance Counsellor, as I simply cannot offer them the time’.
It was clear from data analysis that management have an imperative role to play in the success of the guidance service in any school. If the guidance department is to engage and meet the needs of their students it is clear management need to be supportive and consistent when timetabling the guidance class against other subjects that use the computer room as part of their subject.

When probed on whether the introduction of a ‘mobile educational tool’ such as a tablet would alleviate the demand on the computer room, Interviewees A, C and D had ‘huge reservations’ about introducing such a device. Interviewee D remarked:

‘not a day goes by that there isn’t an issue with social media…its hard enough to manage phones without having a gadget (educational device)’.

While interviewee C felt from experiencing these mobile devices first hand they felt students were ‘disengaged’ from the classroom. Furthermore, this interviewee quoted ‘if you look at American research, students with iPad’s are not doing as well as students without them’.

While other interviewees reported ‘practical things (hardware) not working’ being the biggest barrier to using ICT in the guidance service. Interviewee E reported:

‘I can go into a computer room and have 6/7 computers are not working, therefore there is not enough computers for all students in the class’.

The researcher observed frustration from many interviewees on this point. Having the unusable hardware presented to them was a source of frustration. Interviewee C reported having access ‘…to an LCA computer room which only had 14 computers’ this was not feasible for a typical senior cycle class of 30 as each student requires their own PC to complete the lesson set by the Guidance Counsellor.

### 4.7 Skills and Attitudes towards the use of ICT

#### 4.7.1 Skills

A skill is described ‘as the ability to do something well, with expertise or with ability’

(Oxford dictionary).

From the researcher’s exploration of the phenomenon of ICT in post primary education it is clear from the literature that there is a perception that our young people are ‘IT
savvy’. However, in practice the researcher has found in some cases the opposite to be true. While carrying out her interviews the researcher posed the question to Guidance Counsellors as to how competent they felt their students were when using ICT. The response was varied. Interviewee B remarked

‘anything they do with the internet they fly it but to make a table with six courses and the entry requirements is too technical…’

Interviewee E reported a similar experience with their students

‘I’m always really surprised with how little they know. I think they are really competent with ICT on their phones and very good with Social Media…but using an actual computer they are not very good at all’

Interviewee D even described how students have asked ‘can I look it up on my phone? I can get into my account quicker’. Perhaps the point made by interviewee E

‘because I am searching and finding information all the time, I can have an over expectation of what students can get out of it as well’.

With such a poor knowledge base of general ICT skills Interviewees felt their own knowledge of ICT was constantly being called on to

‘use email, type, do PowerPoints and help them find information on websites’.

Interviewee E felt strongly about having these basic ICT skills otherwise

‘it’s a total waste of time bringing students to the computer room if they cannot find and compile information…it is important to spend time doing this at the beginning of fifth year’.

Once again it was highlighted by a number of interviewees the importance of having a structured programme, like Reach + , when using the computer room. Interviewee D commented that once their sixth years

‘saw what they could do, a lot of them bought into it and completed exercises in their own time’. 
4.7.2 Attitude

Attitude is described as ‘a settled way of thinking about something’ (Oxford dictionary).

Student motivation and maturity level was also flagged as poor during the researcher’s analysis. Interviewee’s A, B, C and D all reported having to monitor their students closely while in the computer room. Interviewee B reported using ‘Netware’, a surveillance package that allows the teacher to monitor all computer screens from their PC at the top of the room. Interviewee B reported this as

‘a great way to stop general browsing and help students get the information on the page they need’

Interviewee E commented that

‘focus and concentration can be difficult for students when they don’t have a focused activity to do’

While interviewee D described their students being ‘half very good and half very helpless’

Interviewees felt age was also a key factor impacting student’s attitude’s and skills in the use of ICT in Guidance lessons. Interviewee C felt their T. Y’s were ‘very competent’ in using Reach+ by the end of the school year. They commented, ‘there are always teething problems but once they get past them they fly it’. Interviewee E described how in fifth year

‘a lot of my lessons are bringing up stuff on the projector and showing students how to find and source information on these websites’

4.8 Professional Development

From carrying out these interviewees it was clear to the researcher that Guidance Counsellors were very eager to learn new ICT skills to improve their guidance service. Interviewee D revealed:

‘I would be open to doing a course on ICT as I can see so many spin off positives out of it’

All incorporate ICT in some way into the delivery of the Guidance service, regardless of having access to the computer room or not. ICT activities were limited to senior cycle in
most cases due to timetable restrictions and the lack of hours available to the guidance counsellor.

Interviewee C commented that they had engaged in training at AGM workshops however, 'they (a company) would be selling a programme’. While most of the interviewees are self-taught in their use of ICT, Interviewee D revealed

'I can’t see how you can function in the next few years without being au fait with it (ICT)'

Interviewee A described a programme that they enrolled in through Trinity College Dublin- ‘its called TL21 , ‘its all about bringing ICT into the classroom’. This interviewee has taken on this course during his own time, however others found being able to get the time off ‘was another barrier’ to implementing ICT activities into the guidance service. Interviewee E made the point that:

‘When Education Centre branches run CPD courses during afternoon slots it is not always possible to leave school, especially when you are leaving every 6/7 weeks for your own supervision. With such a heavy workload, it can be hard to find a work/life balance’.

The opposite was felt for Interviewee E as they expressed great satisfaction at having their full guidance hours restored and being able to attend courses spread out over several sessions as they remarked ‘doing a crash course is of no use to me’.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter presents descriptive accounts of the findings of the interviews that were carried out of the course of this research. The interviews supplied the researcher with the data needed to explore the findings in a thematic format. This data derived from the interviews is presented in a discursive format covering the areas of; The use of ICT in Guidance Lessons, The use of ICT in one to one Career Counselling, Hardware and Broadband, Skills and Attitudes of Students to the use of ICT and finally Professional Development.
Chapter 5

Discussion

5.0 Introduction
Most young people today have access to technology at home or in school (Abbott 2001). As a result, this has changed the way in which teacher teach and students learn. To keep up with this changing practise the guidance counselling service in post-primary education must employ the use of ICT in the delivery of their service to keep up with the way students now learn (DES 2009).

The research findings of this study reveal factors that affect the use of Information Communion Technology (ICT) in the guidance service in a selection of post primary schools in Ireland. In researching Guidance Counsellors use of ICT in the delivery of the guidance service this research simultaneously sought to find reasons why the use of ICT is restricted in the delivery of the Guidance service in a post primary school. From the framework of data generated, it is evident that ICT has become an essential feature of the guidance service in a post primary school and furthermore Guidance Counsellors are eager to expand their ICT knowledge base. However, attempting to implement ICT into the Guidance programme has exposed students’ lack of basic ICT skills which sees an increased reliance on the Guidance Counsellors ICT skills and knowledge. As a result, it is imperative that CPD in the area of ICT is made available for Guidance Counsellors.

5.1 Rationale to Discussion
The discussion is presented under the following five key themes which have emerged from the data analysis:

5.1 ICT as a focus for innovation in the Guidance service within post primary schools
5.2 Teaching and Learning with ICT in the post primary guidance service
5.3 Ringfencing of guidance counselling hours within the post primary service
5.4 Extending the boundaries of the school guidance service with ICT
5.5 The provision of ICT within Junior Cycle guidance counselling service in post primary schools

5.2 ICT as a Focus for Innovation in the Guidance Service within the Post-Primary Sector

‘ICT is a powerful tool that can change the way teachers teach and how students learn’

(DES 2015, p.4)

All interviewees indicated that the use of ICT in their practice was a necessity. To deliver a high quality up to date guidance service that meets the needs of students today access to ICT was imperative. This sentiment coincides with the DES (2015) view of ICT as having an essential role in providing ‘a better and more effective’ educational service to young people today (DES 2015, p.20). Research carried out for this study indicates that ICT is being used in guidance methodologies in a variety of ways to provide a better and more effective service. The OECD (2001) cited the potential significant role ICT could have on the delivery of a guidance services.

Findings from this research have highlighted that ICT is now extensively used in guidance services in post primary schools. Some of the ICT practices that emerged from this research include:

- Data projectors for PowerPoint Presentations
- Use of Careers websites that offer relevant information
- Use of FETC, College and Apprenticeship websites
- Online CAO
- UCAS applications
- Online prospectus that proffer up to date information
- Guidance programmes that integrate online and classroom lessons
- Email, Word

As the literature reports, this increased use of ICT has come in no small measure from the continued investment in school infrastructure from the Irish Government. The application of ICT in the Guidance Service in a post primary school now refers to an array of technologies that can be applied in a variety of ways, not to a single approach therefore the above list is not exhaustive. The European Union defines e-Learning as “the
use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration” (EU 2012). Interviewees expressly viewed access to a structured programme along with access to a computer room as one of the most essential elements to delivering an effective and accessible guidance service for all. Reach+ was favoured by all Guidance Counsellors as one Interviewee described it as ‘very user friendly, the Guidance Counsellor can tailor lessons to the class needs’.

5.2.1 Continuing Professional Development of Guidance Counsellors in the Post-Primary Sector
As the world of work and education are ever changing it is important that guidance counsellors part-take in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Wilcox (2003) describes professional development as the way in which a person ‘maintains the quality of professional service throughout their working life’ (Wilcox 2003, p.6). It is particularly important within the guidance service as guidance counsellors ‘encourage and promote participation in lifelong learning’ (Mckenzie 2015, p.3). Therefore, they should practice what they preach and engage in continued professional development to enhance their service.

However, this research found the biggest barrier to learning new ICT skills was the availability of ICT training and the time available to guidance counsellors to avail of such training. Interviewees described how a lot of CPD workshops take place at IGC branch meetings and they are unable to attend due to the demands on the guidance service in their school. Interviewee E described their situation ‘the biggest barrier can often be getting the time off to attend, it’s not always possible to leave school’. While another interviewee felt that the time allocated for CPD was not always enough ‘I would need to be going to a teachers centre and doing an intensive course rather than a Tuesday afternoon once a month’. These findings are like those of the NCGE (2015) as they described Guidance Counsellors in the post primary sector caught in a ‘catch 22’ trying to manage the increasing demand on their service within a reduced time frame. Yet without engaging in CPD Guidance Counsellors are losing out on the benefiting of ‘upskilling or networking with colleagues on the latest best practice’ (Egan 2015, p.11). The researcher feels that lack of time for CPD was of concern for all
interviewee’s who took part in this research. Guidance Counsellors not being able to avail of the CPD training when it is available should be of concern to the DES. Literature has highlighted that the Guidance department has been considered by students as playing an integral role in their decision-making process for further education and training after post-primary school (DES 2009). Therefore, Guidance Counsellors need to be given sufficient time to upskill to provide a quality guidance service.

Furthermore, technology provides new opportunities for career practitioners, but it also creates a demand of new competence (Kettunen 2015). This research highlights such demands from Guidance Counsellors in the field of practice. When asked if they would be interested in taking part in CPD in ICT all, interviewees for this research responded that they would. Although all interviewees were confident in their own ICT skills they were equally as enthusiastic and keen to part take in upskilling in ICT as a way of improving the delivery of their service within their school. These findings are echoed by Bimrose (2011)

‘The careers profession needs to embrace, further, innovation and change, so that the full potential of ICT can be used to deliver ‘more for less’ in a manner that motivates users of services to access learning and labour market opportunities’

(Interviewee F explained how they had ‘attended a lot of in-services that careers portal offers at various IGC centres and benefitted from them’, but felt more could be done with a more general approach to ICT CPD within the post primary guidance service as ‘you never stop learning with ICT’. Similarly, Interviewee C felt the workshops offered at the IGC AGM ‘would be selling a programme’ rather than some ‘general ICT skills’.

5.3 Teaching and Learning with ICT in the Post-Primary Guidance Service

‘Half of students are very good, half of them are helpless’

(Interviewee D)

Most online guidance resources have been designed so that students can access and use these resources without the support of the guidance counsellor. The DES (2015) state
that schools must ensure that students have ‘a sound base of ICT competencies that will support their learning on transition to further education’ (DES 2015, p.12). Yet from this research Guidance Counsellors are citing that it is becoming increasingly evident that students do not have the basic ICT skills ‘they (students) don’t know how to use Word or send an email’ (Interviewee E). A sentiment expressed by another interviewee highlighted how they felt college is where students become ICT literate; ‘emailing lecturers and submitting assignments online’. For the researcher, this was a surprising finding as from the literature available young people today are continually described as ‘digital natives’. This revelation contradicts findings from the DES (2009) ‘Looking at Guidance’ inspectorates report which found that ‘most students feel competent or very competent in the use of ICT to access information’ (DES 2009, p.27). The researcher feels that perhaps the reintroduction of computer classes at junior cycle may bridge this gap in basic ICT skills which has become apparent. Or perhaps, as literature suggested, ‘incorporate computers across the curriculum’ to improve basic ICT skills (EU 1993).

Nevertheless, Guidance Counsellors interviewed were not deterred by student’s lack ICT skills as many reported using the integrated Reach+ programme with senior cycle students. For all interviewees, this called their own ICT skills to the fore. All interviewees felt competent with the use of what some described as ‘basic ICT skills’ but were open to receiving more focused and useful in-service rather than ‘a crash course’ on one programme. These sentiments are echoed in ‘Looking at Guidance’ (2009) where findings highlighted ICT as ‘a core tool in the guidance provision’ (DES 2009, p.13). Once again with such an emphasis placed on its role in the guidance service, upskilling practicing Guidance Counsellors in ICT should be of paramount importance to the DES. Bimrose et al. (2011) confirm the way in which young people access and use ICT should inform the guidance service. Observations from their research highlight ‘that online multimedia information, online information and links to reputable sources of information are all priorities for the service’ (Bimrose et al. 2011, p.5). This research supports this finding with Guidance Counsellors using the blended approach to teaching by using the Reach+ programme where possible and citing their pupil’s enjoyment of engaging with this integrated approach.
This research has found that there were many drawbacks for Guidance Counsellors implementing ICT into their practice namely,

- Infrastructure
- Cost
- Timetabling

5.3.1 Infrastructure
The €210 Million Digital Strategy for Schools announced in January 2017 will be welcomed by Guidance Counsellors that took part in this research (DES 2017). One of the hindrances Interviewees A, C and E reported to implementing ICT into their service was computers being unavailable as they are broken ‘I can go into the computer room and have 6/7 computers not working- therefore not enough computers for everyone in the class’ (Interviewee E). This was often a source of frustration for the guidance counsellor’s as they were often unaware there was a problem until they were in the computer room with students. The introduction of mobile devices as educational tools would no doubt alleviated the infrastructural pressure of the computer room, however when suggested to some Guidance Counsellors interviewed for this research they were less than enthusiastic about the prospect of mobile devices.

5.3.2 Cost
While all Guidance Counsellors reported the benefits of the Reach+ programme to their Guidance service, the cost of the programme was cited as ‘a barrier for some students’ (Interviewee E). One Guidance Counsellor interview who works in a DEIS school described how ‘if I could get it paid for by the students in full I will be doing really really well’ (Interviewee D). The cost of the Reach+ programme varies depending on the size of the order, however at its cheapest students are required to pay €15 for the workbook and online profile (Careers Portal 2017). Interviewee C described how ‘students going from 3rd into 5th year can be difficult to get money from for the programme as they are not yet in the mindset of looking at careers’.

5.3.3 Timetabling
This research has found enacting Circular 0009/2012 which asks schools to consider enabling ‘students to use directly the extensive range of guidance tools available through the internet from relevant websites’ (DES 2012) is still a struggle for some Guidance Counsellors today. For two interviewees, it was a struggle to secure access to the
computer room due to exam classes being timetabled against the guidance classes. A similar concern highlighted by the DES (2009) inspectorates report that ‘Guidance counsellors experience procedural difficulties in accessing ICT rooms for Guidance in some schools’ (DES 2009, p.13). Interviewees reported being timetabled against subjects such as LCVP (Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme), which is an exam subject, and therefore was given precedence over the guidance class when it came to booking the computer room. One Interviewee puts this down to managements attitude towards the guidance service ‘they wouldn’t know I needed access to the computer room, I would have to tell them’.

This research also reports for some Guidance Counsellors management support for the provision of the guidance service in their school is evident through the consideration given to timetabling at the beginning of the year. Interviewee B described ‘3 out of 4 classes of T.Y have access to the computer room to carry out the Reach+ programme while the other class have access to iPads’. Interviewee A told how ‘I try to take all of my classes in the computer room’.

This disjoined report on the guidance service provision in post primary schools supports the findings of Harkin (2015) who’s research revealed the model of guidance service across post primary schools in Ireland has become varied since the budget cuts of 2012. The importance placed on the guidance counselling service in schools comes down to principal’s own views on how they value the service within their school (Harkin 2015).

5.4 Ringfencing of Guidance Hours

‘Students submitting blank CAO applications has doubled since the cut to guidance’

(IGC 2016)

During the interview process it was found that the effects of Budget 2012 were still being felt by Guidance Counsellors. One interviewee described how ‘this is the first time in years I am timetabled for Guidance, and it took a school inspection for this to happen’ (Interviewee D). Despite figures from the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2012 finding 1 in 10 children and adolescents experience mental health disorders, principals and boards of management are continuing to reduce the service with a national
audit of the service done by the IGC finding 1 in 5 Guidance Counsellors working as full-time teachers (IGC National Audit 2011–2014).

Interviewee C described the guidance service in their school ‘reduced to 8.8 hours’, for them it was obvious that ‘management were placing less emphasis on the guidance service’ and more on exam subjects by placing them back into the classroom. Although the DES circular specified ‘guidance continues to remain a statutory requirement for schools under the Education Act, 1998’ (DES 2012, pp.4-5). It is the researcher’s opinion that recommendations should have been made by the DES at the time to avoid the inevitable erosion to an invaluable service within the post primary sector. Weare (2000) advocates that ‘students learn more effectively, including their academic subjects, if they are happy in their work and feel school is supporting them’.

The school guidance counselling service is the first point of free support many adolescents can avail of in the post primary service, however the IGC national audit 2011-2014 found a 59% reduction in 1:1 counselling (IGC 2014). Another interviewee disclosed how their school management had removed sixth year guidance from the timetable without any explanation ‘6th year guidance classes were taken from the timetable, this wasn’t a good move as students were ready to utilise the 40 minutes for their further education compared to when they were in 5th year’ (Interviewee E). Once again this echoes the findings of Harkin’s (2015) research as a disjointed service now exists in our post primary school guidance counselling service.

Although the focus of this research was Guidance Counsellors use of ICT within the delivery of their service, it became apparent through the interview process that all guidance activities are greatly hampered by the removal of the ex-quota hours in budget 2012. McCoy et al. (2014) highlight that Guidance Counsellors are not the only ones raising concern about the lack of time they have available, students too are worried about the lack of time for individual state counselling and being unable to access information outside of higher education. This lack of time was cited by Interviewee E as a reason for starting the school guidance social media account, to distribute career and further education to students, as they did not have time to see students individually.

Budget 2016 stipulated that ‘two thirds of the number of posts withdrawn from schools in Budget 2012 (DES 2017b, p.1)’ would be restored in September 2017. This year, 2017, a further 100 posts are set to be reinstated by Budget 2017. Although this is a positive
step to the full restoration of hours for guidance activities, circular 0010/2017 does not state that the restored hours must be carried out by Guidance Counsellors (DES 2017b).

5.5 Extending the Boundaries of the Post Primary School Guidance Service with ICT

It is evident from this research that sharing and accessing career guidance information is changing. It is safe to say most people are on at least one form of social media which we use every day (McCanna 2017). Social media now plays an active part in so many people’s lives. Some Guidance Counsellors who took part in this research feel it is the way in forward disseminating careers and further education information. According to the Institute of Educational Science (2012) we are seeing a changing model, ‘from facilitating access to self-help tools and raw information, to an active relationship between client and counsellor, as well as the establishment of communities for clients with similar interests’. One interviewee described how they ‘got students to physically take out their phones and follow the school guidance Facebook and Twitter account’ (Interviewee D). This guidance counsellor found using social media in this way helped the guidance service become more efficient as large volumes of information could be provided to a larger population of students. This not only encourages students to become autonomous about their future but also self-sufficient when it comes to planning their own career path. Additionally, Interviewee D felt the use of social media helped students prepare better for one-to-one career meetings and to make appointments when questions that required a more in-depth analysis arose. Interviewee F cited similar reasons for starting their school Twitter page. Due to time constraints in is becoming no longer possible to disseminate career and future education information within the bounds of the classroom. These feelings are also echoed by Kettunen (2015) who in her research found that it is important that practitioners utilise social media within ‘their own scope of comfort and competence’. In addition, four diverse ways of experiencing social media in career services which have been identified in her research:

1) means for delivering information

2) a medium for one-to-one communication

3) an interactive working space

4) an impetus for paradigm change and reform
It is clear from this research findings that Guidance Counsellors are utilising social media for the delivery of information and in turn this has signalled a paradigm change and reform. As earlier stated, both young and old are now accessing social media at least once a day, the career guidance service can now utilise this access by encouraging students to access careers and further education information.

Likewise, colleges are reaching out to and interacting with potential students using social media forums. Interviewee C described ‘Limerick IT have a live blog that you can ask them a question and they will respond to students, its like a live feed’. It is obvious that, for college and universities, social media is a valuable tool to engage with students as they are deciding on their possible college options. Once again this is bringing guidance beyond the classroom and allowing students instant access to information they need to decide about their future.

Additionally, the use of the blended learning programme Reach+ in senior cycle career guidance has further enhanced the service for some guidance counsellors. Interviewee C described ‘a lot of students are using reach plus at home as they have limited access to the computer room in school’. While Interviewee D confessed to being ‘surprised when they tell me, I looked it up’. Students are applying what they have learned in the classroom and bringing it home to research further in their own time. The researcher felt that this was encouraging for the guidance counselling service as students are taking responsibility for their future by furthering their knowledge of information disseminated by the guidance counsellors.

The Guidance Counsellors who took part in this research also revealed how students are becoming more efficient when it comes to making appointments to meet with their school guidance counsellors. Using the messaging system through the Reach+ programme or through their own school emails, students and Guidance Counsellors are no longer wasting time looking for one another. Guidance Counsellors are using ICT to make the service more efficient, while students are utilising ICT to get the most out of the Guidance service in their school.
5.6 The provision of ICT within Junior Cycle Guidance Counselling Service in Post-Primary Schools

‘There is nothing prescribed for Junior Cycle Guidance in the school’

(Interviewee D)

The above statement by an interviewee did not come as a shock to the researcher. The Guidance Counsellor is responsible for a range of guidance activities at both Junior and Senior levels in a post primary school. However, as literature has stated, historically there has been little or no allowance for Junior Cycle Guidance counselling within the school timetable. The DES (2009) inspectorates report found ‘a lack of balance in guidance provision between the junior cycle and senior cycle in a considerable number of schools’ (DES 2009, p.11). Unfortunately, the same inequality exists today as students feel ‘they only had contact with the Guidance Counsellor in 5th and 6th year’ (Hearne et al. 2016a, p.74). Guidance Counsellors echo these findings with many contacting Junior Cycle class groups once or twice in the academic year and some Guidance Counselling blaming time constraints as the reason for not making contact at all.

This research also found that when trying to make contact Junior Cycle classes the Guidance Counsellors relied on the SPHE and Religion teachers to facilitate them taking their classes for guidance counselling purposes. For all Guidance Counsellors interviewed it was clear that a whole school approach to implementing the guidance counselling service at Junior Cycle was imperative for the Guidance Counsellor to access Junior Cycle classes. Although the idea of guidance being the responsibility of the whole school has been in circulation since the Department of Education’s 1992 Green Paper on Education

Students cited the importance of having the Guidance Counsellor talk about subject choice was highlighted in a recent case study. It was found that Senior Cycle students recognised the ‘importance of subject choice talks on future career options’ (Hearne et al. 2016a, p.85) yet this research highlights without the co-operation of the other subject teachers this valuable part of the Junior Cycle Guidance would not be able to be carried out without their support. ICT was utilised in the form of power points in most of cases to disseminate information on subject choice.
Interviewee D and B felt that a series of structured lessons would be of benefit in each year at the Junior cycle, however admittedly most of the Guidance Counsellors interviewed stated that much of contact with Junior Cycle students was seasonal and the most important thing 'was to make sure you touched based with them and made them aware there is a Guidance Counsellor in the school'. For Interviewee B, they had plans to speak to 1st and 2nd year students however due to time constraints did not manage to reach on those plans. It has been highlighted by Smyth and Calvert (ERSI 2011) that Junior Cycle experiences play a vital role in influencing students later decisions about progression after their post primary education. It is obvious from this research and research which has gone before it that there is a need for students to have earlier contact with the guidance counselling service, i.e. at Junior Cycle level, within their school to make better and more informed choices about subject choice (DES 2009; Hearne et al. 2016a; IGC 2013).

With research from the IGC (2013) finding only 9.69% of classroom guidance being spent by Guidance Counsellors on Junior cycle students and the findings of this research supporting the little contact time Guidance Counsellors experience with Junior Cycle students, little to no ICT is implemented in the Junior Cycle guidance programme.

5.7 Conclusion
This chapter has discussed the five overarching themes that emerged in relation to the implementation of ICT in the post primary guidance counselling service in Ireland. The topics were examined though engagement with the literature and the primary findings. This offered a number of insights into the best practises of Guidance Counselling with the use of ICT and also highlighted a number of barriers to integrating ICT into the guidance counselling service in post primary schools.

This chapter has highlighted the capacity ICT has to enhancing the delivery of the post primary guidance service. Guidance Counsellors enjoy the blended approach to teaching and believe their students enjoy this integrated approach to their learning. Furthermore, Guidance Counsellors are keen to embrace and utilise all that ICT has to offer. However, the integration of ICT into their guidance service has been hampered by many obstacles, namely;
Guidance Counsellors being unable to avail of CPD due to time constraints

Students lacking in basic ICT skills

Principals and management’s lack of consideration for ICT in the Guidance service

Lack of practical ICT upskilling available

Accessing the computer room and computer hardware issues

The researcher has noted the key role a school principal plays in supporting change in school practices. This research has highlighted some Guidance Counsellors citing lack of principal support as the reason for the above obstacles impeding the use of ICT in their delivery of a guidance service for all in their school. This chapter highlighted the need for the DES to ringfence the guidance counselling hours within post primary education for Guidance Counsellors to meet the demands of the personal, educational, vocational and career guidance and counselling elements of the guidance service.

This chapter also highlighted how social media is being utilised by two Guidance Counsellors who took part in this research. It is being used as a means of bringing further education and careers information outside of the bounds of the classroom and onto the personal devices of students. Both Guidance Counsellors reported positive feedback from students on accessing information shared online by them. Finally, this chapter outlined the continuously growing gap in service between Junior Cycle guidance and Senior Cycle guidance. In the final chapter an appraisal of the research conducted will be outlined.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.0 Introduction
This chapter will offer a conclusion within the context of the aim and objectives of this study. The strengths and limitations of this research are presented in this chapter along with the implications for policy and practice. This chapter also offers many recommendations brought to light by findings from this research. Lastly, the researcher presents a reflexive analysis of their own personal and professional learning during this research.

6.1 Overview of Findings
The overall aim of this research was to investigate the current situation of ICT (Information Communication Technology) in post primary schools in Ireland and the potential ICT has to enhancing the provision of the guidance counselling service within post primary education. Additionally, many objectives were identified to address the overall aim. A qualitative approach was applied as the researcher wished to understand the situation of ICT from the perspective of the Guidance Counsellor. For this reason, the researcher opted to use interviews as the medium for which to collect their data.

Five themes that emerged in the research revealed the key issues of the subject. These themes were as follows:

1. ICT as a focus for innovation in the Guidance service within post primary schools
2. Teaching and Learning with ICT in the post primary guidance service
3. Ringfencing of guidance counselling hours within the post primary service
4. Extending the boundaries of the school guidance service with ICT
5. The provision of ICT within Junior Cycle guidance counselling service in post primary schools
6.2 ICT as a Focus for Innovation in the Guidance Service within Post-Primary Schools

Guidance Counsellors interviewed for this research agreed that using ICT was a way to make their service more efficient as their time with students on a one to one basis and through timetabled classes is continually diminishing. Both Guidance Counsellors and students are now booking appointments using school emails and the emailing system on the Reach+ programme. From this research, Guidance Counsellors have a positive attitude to the integration of ICT into their practice however the support of management is key to implementing ICT as considerations need to be made at the beginning of the year regarding timetabling, to access computer rooms, and the allocation of hours of guidance counselling ours to ensure students have ‘appropriate access to guidance’.

Furthermore, this research highlighted a gap in the CPD training of Guidance Counsellors. For ICT to be a focus for innovation practitioners need to have the skills to inform their service. This research has highlighted the appeal from Guidance Counsellors to have further ICT training to have a guidance service that meets the needs of their students.

6.2.1 Teaching and Learning with ICT in the Post-Primary Guidance Service

Surprisingly, this research has found that Guidance Counsellors are teaching their students the basic ICT skills they need to utilise ICT within the guidance counselling service in their school. Nevertheless, once past this guidance counsellors enjoyed using the blended approach to guidance. Interviewees felt that using ICT encouraged students to become more autonomous when it came to making a decision about their further education or training.

6.2.2 Ringfencing of Guidance Counselling Hours within the Post-Primary Service

Section 9C of the 1998 Education Act explicitly acknowledges guidance counselling as an entitlement for all. The guidance counselling service in post primary schools has long since been established as a key service in supporting all children, regardless of their circumstances to reach their full potential. The Government had a key role to play in the downgrading of this service by removing the ex-quota allocation for guidance counselling in post primary schools. This left the allocation of hours for the guidance counselling service to be taken from the general school allocation at the discretion of school principals and management. Guidance Counsellors are finding it increasingly
difficult to reach on the demand of their work due to being time poor and inadequately supported by management.

6.2.3 Extending the Boundaries of the School Guidance service with ICT
This research also observed that ICT was used in most of cases in career guidance and further education and not in personal counselling. Guidance Counsellors who took part in this study have noted that the majority of their one to one sessions are taken by the demands of personal counselling which they cite are increasing on a weekly basis. Therefore, to disseminate as much career and further education material as possible some Guidance Counsellors are utilising social media as a means of sharing information with their students.

6.2.4 The provision of ICT within Junior Cycle Guidance Counselling Service in Post-Primary Schools
The guidance service offers support to students as they make important choices that have lasting effects at both junior and senior cycle in their post primary education (NCGE 2004). Sadly, there has been no perceptible change in the distribution of guidance service between junior and senior cycle. Guidance counselling is persistently focused at senior cycle despite the DES inspectorate report “Looking at Guidance” (2009) recommending ‘nearly half of all schools need to enhance their guidance provision at junior cycle’ (DES 2009 p 24).

6.3 Strengths and Limitations of Study

6.3.1 Strengths of Study
This research aimed to inform guidance counsellor’s in post primary schools of the best practices with the use of ICT in the guidance counselling service. It builds on Patton’s (2016) research which explored the function of ICT in Post-Primary School Guidance Counselling Provision in Ireland. Furthermore, it contributes to the guidance counselling research base within an Irish context.

The researcher feels a further strength of their research was going out into the field and gathering primary data on the research topic. By doing this the researcher got to experience the frontline service being provided by Guidance Counsellors in the post primary education system. In addition, it gave Guidance Counsellors an opportunity to
express their own opinions and experiences on the implementation and use of ICT in their practice.

6.3.2 Limitations of Study
In this research, a qualitative approach was utilised which consisted of random sampling. The sample population of Guidance Counsellors was small therefore, it would be incorrect to generalise the findings from this research and apply it to the guidance service in all post primary schools in Ireland. Furthermore, the research does not allow the researcher to make generalisations about the practice of every guidance counsellor in post primary schools in Ireland. Theme mapping was employed for data analysis; therefore, a limitation of this research may be the researchers subjective interpretation of data (Cohen et al 2011).

Like the interviewees who took part in this research, the researcher is a member of the guidance counselling department in their school. Although the researcher has tried to account for and reduce the influence of my own personal bias on their research, the researcher has stated previously that they are a member of the cohort in which the research was conducted.

Another shortcoming of this research was the number of Guidance Counsellors the researcher had access to. The researcher is aware that more Guidance Counsellors would have greatly enhanced the scope of this research and could have captured a greater picture of the impact if ICT on the guidance service in post primary schools. However, the time of the year the researcher conducted their research dictated the number of Guidance Counsellors available for interview.

If the researcher was to undertake this research again they would carry out interviews with the student population at random in the schools where the Guidance Counsellors were interviewed. This would bring a greater scope to the study as it would encapsulate the students experience of using ICT within the guidance counselling service in their school. Additionally, as literature informs us, management have a crucial role to play in running of an effective guidance service. The researcher is of the belief that it would be interesting to interview principals to determine their understanding of the use of ICT in the running of the guidance counselling service within their school.
6.4 Implications at a Practical and Research Level
At a practical level the findings of this research can inform future practice in the guidance counselling in post primary education. This research supports the call for the restoration of hours for the guidance counselling service in post-primary schools.

6.5 Recommendations
Below are the recommendations for policy, practice and research:

1. School principals and management should consider the positive body of research associated with the blended approach to learning and therefore make greater considerations when designing the school timetable for the school year.
2. The ex-quota allocation of guidance counselling hours need to be reinstated as a matter of urgency to ensure students are supported with ‘appropriate guidance’.
3. A disproportionate guidance counselling service is still being experienced between junior and senior cycle guidance.
4. The DES could support the blended approach to learning with appropriate CPD for Guidance Counsellors.
5. Deficits in CPD within the area of ICT need to be addressed by the IGC in conjunction with the NCGE to support their members run an efficient guidance service that meets the needs for their students.
6. The Government need to take heed of the national audits carried out by the IGC on the impact of the removal of ex quota hours for Guidance Counselling service in post primary education. These audits along with this research highlight a time poor, under resourced service that is failing to meet the increasing needs of students today.

6.6 Reflexivity in Relation to Personal Learning
Throughout the course of this research a reflexive approach was applied to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon of ICT and its implication on the guidance service. Etherington (2004) stresses that researchers consider their own personal, social and cultural context. In applying Etherington’s (2004) basic model of reflexivity I kept a research diary throughout the process of this research. Furthermore, while conducting
interviews I also used note-taking to document any additional or significant information I felt was relevant to my research.

Being a trainee Guidance Counsellor in my field of research I had formulated my own opinions on the subject, in the primary stages of this research, due to previous experience with utilising ICT in the post primary guidance service. I assumed that Guidance Counsellors were underutilising ICT in their guidance service and would be resistant to a change in their practice. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the encouraging attitudes of all Guidance Counsellors interviewed to integrate ICT in the Guidance service. I was also impressed by their positive and eager attitude to become more competent for the good of the guidance service in their school. I have experienced great learning during this research as interviewees shared their best practices and experiences with implementing and using ICT within the guidance service in their schools. This has informed my own practice by not taking for granted that senior cycle students know the basic ICT skills that maybe required when implementing a guidance programme such as Reach+. Additionally, I have become more conscious of working with junior cycle students, in particular third year students as literature has shown the early years in post primary can be highly influential on choices students make later on in their schooling. Furthermore, making time at the end of each school year to consult with management on the importance of timetabling and allocating sufficient guidance hours is imperative to run a guidance service that meets the needs of our students today.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes this investigation into the phenomenon of ICT in post primary schools and its impact on the guidance service. This chapter summarised the main findings and addressed the strengths and limitations of the research. Additionally, through the analysis of its primary findings this chapter it has put forward several recommendations to inform the discipline of guidance counselling within post primary education. Finally, this chapter puts forward the reflexivity of the researcher along with the personal and professional learning encountered by the researcher during this research.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: Subject information letter (Gatekeeper)

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

Subject Information Letter (Gatekeeper)

EHS REC no.

Date: Research title:

Dear ______,

I am currently a student of the MA Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education and Professional Studies, University of Limerick, under the supervision Fred Tuite. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research, I aim to investigate the topic of ‘the phenomenon of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in post primary education and its potential to enhance the delivery of the guidance service in post primary schools’. In order to gather information on this I would appreciate if you would give me consent to carry out the research with members of the Kildare branch of the IGC. For you this would involve sending out a Participant Subject Information Letter and Consent Form to the Branch Members on my behalf. The research I am doing will involve me carrying out a 40 minute audio-taped interview with volunteers at a time and location convenient to them.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity of individuals and schools. Interviews will be audio recorded and the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to data analysis. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location in the University of Limerick. It is important to note that volunteers will not be named in the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.
If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

_________________________________
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This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (need to insert EHSREC no. here when approved). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact: Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office University of Limerick Tel (061) 234101 ehsresearchethics@ul.ie
Appendix B: Subject Information Letter (Volunteer)

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter (Volunteer)

EHSREC no.
Date:

Research title: An exploration into the phenomenon of ICT in post primary education and its potential to enhance the delivery of the career guidance service in a post primary school.

Dear (Guidance Counsellor),

I am currently a student of the MA Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Fred Tuite. As part of my studies I must complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research, I aim to explore the topic of ‘the phenomenon of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in post primary education and its potential to enhance the delivery of the guidance service in post primary schools’. The definition of ICT for the purpose of this research will focus on computer and internet based technologies. The study will examine the level of education and professional development available to Guidance Counsellors and will provide insight into the role of ICT in the delivery of the Guidance Service in post-primary schools.

In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audio taped interview. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you. If a face-to-face interview is inconvenient arrangements can also be made for a telephone or Skype interview.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after the analysis process. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences.

The collected data will be stored in a secure location in the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name or the name of your school will not be used in the reporting of the research. If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor.
If you wish to take part in my study please contact me by the 10th of April so we can arrange a time and place for the interview to take place.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and consider my request.

______________________________
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   Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie.

*This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (need to insert EHSREC no. here when approved). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact: Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS Faculty Office University of Limerick Tel (061) 234101 ehsresearchethics@ul.ie*
Appendix C: Consent Form (Branch Secretary)

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

EHS REC no: 2017_03_15_EHS

Consent Form (Branch Secretary)

Research title: An exploration into the phenomenon of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in post primary education and its potential to enhance the delivery of the career guidance service in a post primary school.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the XXX branch of the IGC will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study.

The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Caroline Brennan to carry out this research in the XXX branch of the IGC:

Signature:_____________________________________
Printed name:__________________________________
Signature of Researcher:_________________________
Date:__________________________________
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form (Volunteer)

EHS REC no: 2017_03_15_EHS

Consent Form (Volunteer)

Research title: An exploration into the phenomenon of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in post primary education and its potential to enhance the delivery of the career guidance service in a post primary school.

• I understand what this research project is about, and what the results will be used for.
• I am fully aware of the procedures and of the risks and the benefits of the study.
• I am fully aware that the recording of the interview and the data generated from it will be kept confidential.
• I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
• I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature: _____________________________________
Printed name: __________________________________
Signature of Researcher: _________________________
Date: _________________________________________
Appendix E: Transcription Service Confidentiality Consent Form

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
O L L S C O I L _ L U I M N I G H

Transcription Service Confidentiality Consent Form

EHS REC no: 2017_03_15_EHS

Dear [Researcher’s Name],

As part of the transcription process, I understand that certain confidentiality conditions need to be adhered to in order to protect the privacy of participants involved in your study. Therefore, the interview data will be kept strictly confidential and the transcribed data will only be provided to you, the researcher of the study. Under no circumstances will the names of the participants, individuals, locations or organisations be identified or disclosed by the transcriber. Where relevant, pseudonyms will be used at all times.

Transcriber’s Name: ……………………………………..

Signature:…………………………………………………

Researcher’s Name: Caroline Brennan

Signature:…………………………………………………

Date:…………………………….
Appendix F: Interview Guide

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

EHS REC no: 2017_03_15_EHS

Opening

a) What are your qualifications? How long have you been a guidance counsellor in a post primary school?
b) What type of school do you work in?
c) How many individuals are in the Guidance Department in your school?
d) If you were to quantify your work as a guidance counsellor, would you say you spend most of your time on one-to-one guidance or classroom guidance?

1. Competency in ICT
a) How confident are you with ICT within the guidance service?
b) Does ICT form part of your delivery of the guidance service in your school?
c) If yes, could you give a brief summary of the activities ICT is used for?
d) Have you been offered or seen any CPD for Guidance counsellors in Post Primary schools?

2. Curricular
a) Do you think students know how to use ICT in order to get their desired information with regards to future education and the world of work,
b) Do you feel the use of ICT aids students when deciding what they want to do when they finish post primary education?

3. School in which the Guidance service is being delivered
a) How many students are in the school where you teach?
b) Where is the guidance activities focused? Why is this?
c) What is the ICT infrastructure like in your school with regards to Wi-Fi, access to computer room or BYOD (Bring your own device)?
d) How do you find managements attitude towards ICT in guidance?

4. Issues with the use of ICT
a) Do you have regular access to the computer room for guidance classes?
b) What do you feel are the student’s attitudes to the use of ICT in guidance?
c) What do you feel is the most common hindrance to using ICT in the guidance service?
d) Do you feel the introduction of an educational device such as an IPad may enhance the delivery of the guidance service in post primary schools?

5. Recommendations
   a) Are there any guidance activities that you would like to implement in your school?
   b) Are there any guidance counselling packages that you have seen that you thought you would like to use in your own teaching?
   c) What is holding you back from using these activities or packages in your school?
   d) Is there anything further you wish to add?