The authors report on a case study of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in second-level education which they carried out in a DEIS school in which this model of guidance counselling was in place. Their study examines the views of different stakeholders, including teachers, and discusses the implications of these views for future delivery of guidance counselling.

Introduction

This article will report on findings from a recent explanatory case study (Hearne et al., 2016) carried out against a background of policy, practice, and research on a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in second-level education. The collaborative research study examined the views of different stakeholders, including teachers, and considers the implications for future guidance delivery in the sector. Since teachers are identified as key stakeholders in whole-school initiatives, their perceptions of whole-school guidance counselling matter greatly.

The concept of whole-school guidance counselling in secondary education as everybody’s responsibility has become more pronounced in recent years (ACCS et al., 2017; DES, 2005, 2012). In reality, implementation of this vision in the school system is somewhat disparate (Hearne et al., 2016). One reason for this may be a lack of policy direction by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in assisting schools to realise this vision, as well as reactive measures since Budget 2012’s re-allocation resulting in the decentralisation of decision-making on guidance counselling resources to school management. However, to maximise guidance resources in schools, greater deliberation is needed on the specific roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders in whole-school guidance to students. This key finding emerged in a recent in-depth case study that sought to examine whole-school guidance counselling provision in one DEIS voluntary school involving a number of stakeholders from the school (Hearne et al., 2016). The perceptions of teachers and support staff (n = 37 out of 61 staff) were collected through an online survey on the delivery of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling, guidance-related activities, professional roles, and the impact of the 2012 Budget re-allocation on guidance provision.

Collaboration

The emphasis on a whole-school approach to guidance counselling, encompassing various roles and responsibilities for school management, school staff, and external stakeholders, mirrors other whole-school curriculum initiatives such as the Transition Year Programme (Jeffers, 2010), literacy...
and numeracy strategies (DES, 2011), Junior Cycle Wellbeing Programme (DES, 2013), and Student Support Team system (DES, 2014). Teachers are being tasked with engaging in diverse curriculum activities to support both the academic and the personal, social, and emotional development of students in their care. It is envisioned that the board of management and school management are responsible for overseeing guidance provision by working with the guidance counsellor and school staff to manage guidance planning, develop a School Guidance Plan, and ensure its consistent implementation (ACCS et al., 2017; NCGE, 2004).

The proposition is that subject teachers can support the delivery of the guidance programme to students through classroom engagement (e.g. SPHE, RE), provision of relevant subject advice for course and career-related decisions, and formal management or pastoral care roles (ACCS et al., 2017; NCGE, 2004). Research also suggests that respectful, empathic relationships between teachers and students play an important role in student well-being (Headstrong, 2015). Students may request advice from teachers, and teachers are expected to work collaboratively in seeking advice from the school guidance service for issues deemed outside their professional competencies (NCGE, 2004).

**Holistic and Integrated**

Guidance counselling in Irish schools is quite unique, as it is holistic, incorporating personal and social, educational, and career guidance (Hearne and Gavin, 2014; NCGE, 2004), and it is integrated, involving the whole school community (ACCS et al., 2017; DES, 2005, 2012). In the case study school, the school management viewed guidance counselling as a whole-school responsibility, and it was being delivered to students across the curriculum through processes that involved guidance, teaching, and support staff (Hearne et al., 2016). However, the teachers in the school held a multiplicity of perspectives on their understanding of guidance counselling. The school has its own Whole School Guidance Programme, which concentrates on supporting students' education and career development for future progression; it has a Student Support Team (SST) structure; and some teachers reported referring students directly to the school guidance service. Although 63 per cent of the teachers perceived that there was a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in the school, a significant cohort (36%) perceived there was not. These conflicting views may be due to diverse understandings of the aims and scope of guidance counselling in the school. Some teachers believed there was more emphasis on career guidance to students on college course choices (CAO) and the dissemination of careers information. Others suggested the emphasis was more on supporting student well-being or personal counselling. The ongoing issue of equitable guidance counselling provision in Junior and Senior Cycle also emerged (Hearne et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2014). In terms of the Junior Cycle, many teachers (77%) perceived counselling as the most important aspect, with personal and social guidance (59%) and advice-giving (50%) also deemed important. In contrast, 91 per cent of the teachers rated the provision of career information equally important as counselling in Senior Cycle.

91 per cent of teachers rated the provision of career information equally important as counselling in Senior Cycle.
School Guidance Plan

The School Guidance Plan is a central component of whole-school guidance counselling to facilitate students’ access to a developmental guidance programme (ACCS et al., 2017; DES, 2005, 2012; NCGE, 2004). In the case study school, only 12 per cent of teachers were aware of the Plan’s existence, and 20 per cent did not know who should be involved in its development (Hearne et al., 2016). Given the significance of a School Guidance Plan in communicating roles and responsibilities, this might account for the divergent perceptions on the presence of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling. These findings need to be considered in the context of the levels of engagement across the school community in whole-school guidance counselling provision.

United staff response to serious issues

Students value their relationships with teachers, and many teachers view pastoral care and student well-being as an important element of their professional role (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Lam and Hui, 2010). A whole-school approach to guidance counselling can therefore provide a united staff response to serious issues for students; but it is a complex endeavour and assumes a significant level of professional commitment from teachers (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hearne et al., 2016). Previous research indicates that due to staff shortages, time pressures, and increased paperwork, teachers may be hesitant to become involved in pastoral care and student support activities (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; Hearne et al., 2017). This is particularly relevant regarding teachers’ professional competencies, and whilst education and training to support teachers in whole-school activities is recognised, there is divergence about the form of training required (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; McCoy et al., 2006; Teach First, 2015). For example, counselling requires specialist training for effective implementation and does not form part of initial teacher education programmes, whereas it is included in initial guidance counselling training programmes.

Defining roles

Greater transparency on the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in whole-school guidance provision is also an issue (Hearne et al., 2016). In the case study, 16 per cent of the teachers indicated they did not know what their role was in relation to whole school guidance. Some identified it in terms of academic-subject-related guidance, whereas others viewed it as an overall pastoral care role with students. Some teachers were directly involved in the Student Support Teams as Year Heads, whilst others viewed their role as one of referral to the guidance service. Some identified a more general supportive role in contributing to a positive and caring school environment. None of them referred directly to the school’s specific Whole School Guidance Programme and the associated activities that involved teaching staff.

Erosion of guidance counselling provision

Although DEIS schools did maintain their allocation of 18.25 hours (DES, 2012) in Budget 2012, the erosion of guidance counselling provision in general has been consistently reported (ASTI, 2013; IGC, 2016; NCGE, 2013; TUI, 2014). In the case study school, teachers’ perceptions of changes in its guidance provision varied from 68 per cent who were unsure of any...
changes, to 18 per cent who had not seen any changes, to 14 per cent who had noted changes (Hearne et al., 2016). The issue of adequate time and resources to deliver the school guidance service was highlighted as a key challenge, with some teachers referring to the extensive role of the guidance counsellor for a large cohort of students.

**CPD on whole-school approaches**

To conclude, the increasing attention now given to promoting well-being in secondary schools is to be welcomed. While well-being promotion is a plausible concept, there is a propensity for confusion over how guidance counselling can make a specific and distinctive contribution to students’ well-being, and a lack of clarity on how this is manifested in reality. With regard to delivery of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling, the challenges for school management and staff are significant, as teachers need to embody a shared understanding of the concept and its implications in their practice (Hearne et al., 2016). An appropriate starting point could be in initial teacher education, which is a fertile ground in which to introduce these concepts and practices. Ongoing school-based CPD for teachers on whole-school approaches in the curriculum can also ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills to contribute in a meaningful and holistic way to students’ development.

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**REFERENCES**


Dr Debbie Ging, Associate Professor of Media Studies in the School of Communications, delivered the keynote address at the Educate Together annual Ethical Education Conference in Malahide in November 2017.

Educate Together Conference on ‘Gender Matters’

The annual Educate Together Ethical Education Conference focused this year on ‘Gender Matters’. It was held in Malahide, Co Dublin, in November 2017 and was attended by over 200 teachers, students, educators and exhibitors from all over Ireland.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr Debbie Ging, Associate Professor of Media Studies in the School of Communications, DCU. Dr Ging spoke about gender issues around social media, cyberbullying, the harmful stereotyping (gender straight-jacketing) of both boys and girls and the sexualisation of children. She challenged the conference attendees to address the power relations that underpin sexism and the systemic, institutional, societal nature of gender discrimination.


Role and Work of SUSI

Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) is a business unit of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB), which is designated by the Minister for Education and Skills as the single Irish national awarding authority for student grants in further and higher education. Since 2012, SUSI has replaced 66 former local grant awarding authorities. Its role is to enable students to receive financial support for their studies in accordance with the eligibility criteria of the Student Grant Schemes prescribed annually by the Minister.

SUSI was established in challenging times, both nationally and in terms of the public service staffing moratorium, and experienced acknowledged operational difficulties in its first year. In subsequent years however, SUSI has improved its performance and is now regarded as an example of successful public service delivery transformation.

Outputs

The core work of SUSI involves the processing of large numbers of grant applications from April to October each year and the payment of awarded grants from September to June. More than 105,000 grant applications were received for the 2016-17 academic year and approximately 84,000 grants were awarded, representing student grant funding of €365m.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant Applications</td>
<td>69700</td>
<td>92200</td>
<td>103800</td>
<td>108200</td>
<td>105300</td>
<td>103200</td>
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<td>Grant Awards</td>
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<td>59900</td>
<td>75200</td>
<td>83900</td>
<td>84100</td>
<td>84200</td>
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Resources

SUSI has administration costs of approximately €8.5m annually and an approved staffing complement of 100 Full Time Equivalents (FTE). Temporary additional staff are recruited annually to meet seasonal workflow requirements.

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<tr>
<td>Cost per Application</td>
<td>€115</td>
<td>€117</td>
<td>€89</td>
<td>€81</td>
<td>€78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost per Grant Award</td>
<td>€197</td>
<td>€180</td>
<td>€122</td>
<td>€105</td>
<td>€98</td>
<td>€96</td>
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Cost of Outputs

While the numbers of grant applications and awards have increased from 2012 to 2017, the average SUSI processing costs per application and award have generally declined year on year.
Performance
Under a Management Framework Agreement implemented between the Department of Education and Skills and the CDETB, SUSI has met and exceeded its key annual performance targets for the timely processing of grant applications and for the payment of awarded grants.

Service Delivery
SUSI is a modern, centralised government service that seeks to achieve continuous improvement in its service delivery for students and other stakeholders. The grant application process has been fully online since 2012. The eligibility assessment process is streamlined through the use of integrated ICT systems, quality assurance systems and other controls. There is currently a project underway to deliver a new fully integrated SUSI ICT system for 2019, which will further streamline the end to end process, providing a “best in class” customer experience.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Application Processing:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of new applications completed</td>
<td>55% by 31 Oct 75% by 30 Nov 85% by 31 Dec</td>
<td>55% 77% 88%</td>
<td>56% 75% 86%</td>
<td>81% 90% 97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of renewal applications completed</td>
<td>95% by 31 Oct (30 Nov)</td>
<td>94% (97%)</td>
<td>92% (95%)</td>
<td>95% 96%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grant Payments:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total anticipated new awards paid</td>
<td>40% by 31 Oct 65% by 30 Nov 85% by 31 Dec</td>
<td>44% 71% 84%</td>
<td>43% 69% 85%</td>
<td>53% 70% 85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total anticipated renewal awards paid</td>
<td>80% by 31 Oct 95% by 30 Nov (31 Dec)</td>
<td>92% 98%</td>
<td>94% (98%)</td>
<td>95% 96%</td>
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</table>

The SUSI support desk service provides advice and information for students, and other stakeholders, at all stages of the grant application and payment process through telephone, e-mail, social media and website communications. SUSI implements broad-spanning stakeholder engagement structures and, through its student outreach programme, attends at many college open days and other information events nationwide.

As a consequence of these changes, the average number of student interactions arising per grant application (calls, e-mails, social media and supporting documents) have reduced significantly.

The requirement for supporting documents from students has been significantly reduced through advanced data sharing with other government agencies (the graphic bellows identifies some of these data sharing partners) and monthly grant payments are made directly to students’ bank accounts by electronic transfer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
<th>2016/17</th>
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<td>Student Interactions per Application</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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For further information on SUSI, please visit its website www.susi.ie