An exploratory study of Guidance Counsellors’ perception of the collaborative nature of their work with School Management and Peer Teachers in the Post-Primary Sector.

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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 the University of Limerick, or any other institution.

Signature: ________________________________
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<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>American Counselling Association</td>
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<td>ACSA</td>
<td>The American School Counsellor Association</td>
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<td>ASTI</td>
<td>Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continued Professional Development</td>
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<td>CSPE</td>
<td>Civic, Social and Political Education</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>IGC</td>
<td>Institute of Guidance Counsellors</td>
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<td>JMB</td>
<td>Joint Managerial Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCA</td>
<td>The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</td>
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<td>NCGE</td>
<td>National Centre for Guidance in Education</td>
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<td>NGF</td>
<td>National Guidance Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPHE</td>
<td>Social, Personal and Health Education</td>
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<td>WSA</td>
<td>Whole-School Approach</td>
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Abstract

A number of research studies and publications have exposed the effects of 2012 budget cuts to the guidance counselling provision in the post-primary sector (ASTI 2013, Hearne et al 2016, IGC, 2013, JMB, 2012, Leahy et al 2016). However, a gap in the current research exists in relation to how guidance counsellors perceive the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peer teachers. The purpose of this study is to explore guidance counsellors’ narratives about their experiences and attitudes of engaging in collaborative work with school management and peer teachers in achieving a whole-school approach to guidance counselling and identifying the implications collaboration has on the delivery of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector. The research study involved an interpretivist qualitative method of semi-structured interviews, conducted one-to-one with six guidance counsellors, with three participants from DEIS schools and three participants from voluntary secondary schools. Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis approach (2006) was applied in this study. As a result, three overarching themes emerged: 1. School Management’s value of Guidance Counselling, 2. Peer Teachers’ value of Guidance Counselling and 3. Guidance Counsellors’ attitudes to Collaboration. Findings of this study suggest that Guidance Counsellors consider collaboration an integral part of their role, but there are many factors that influence engagement in collaborative work. It is evident that increased hours and resources are needed to ensure increased collaboration in achieving the goals of whole-school guidance. This research study may inform policy and practice about how best to improve collaboration between guidance counsellors and some of the key stakeholders.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

According to the Department of Education and Skills, guidance counselling in Ireland consists of a holistic model of support for post-primary students, incorporating the three strands of “personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” (DES, 2005, p4). However, since the withdrawal of ex-quota allocation of hours to guidance counselling in budget 2012, the delivery of guidance counselling at post-primary level has undergone radical change. This resulted in reduced guidance hours, with school managements now having autonomy in regards to the hours allocated to the guidance service in their respective post-primary settings. Hence, despite a recent, partial recovery of guidance hours to post-primary education (DES 2017), the delivery of an adequate guidance service has depended on a collaborative whole-school approach. This involves key stakeholders such as guidance counsellors, school management and teaching staff.

A number of research studies and publications have exposed the effects of 2012 budget cuts to the guidance counselling sector (ASTI 2013, Hearne et al 2016, IGC, 2013, JMB, 2012, Leahy et al 2016). According to an article written in The Irish Times (19th May, 2015), the Institute of Guidance Counsellors claimed that austerity measures have led to inequality in the education system and the removal of guidance counselling from post-primary schools has “entrenched the privilege of those who are already privileged” (IGC, cited in The Irish Times, 2015). According to a press release from the IGC (2016), budget 2012 cuts to guidance resulted in:

1. A 25% overall reduction in hours, with 1 in 5 guidance counsellors (168 in total) being removed from their position as guidance counsellors.
2. Guidance counsellors been given subject teaching hours, sometimes in conjunction with the delivery of guidance. This finding was also represented in research conducted by Leahy et al, 2016).
3. A 59% reduction in one-to-one counselling, with 200 post-primary school having no counselling hours at all.
4. As a result, Further Education Schools and particularly DEIS schools were exposed to greater educational disadvantage and inequality. These schools support students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, immigrants and those with special needs.
These figures suggest that budget 2012 has changed the way guidance counselling is delivered and put an increased obligation on guidance counsellors, school management and teaching staff to plan and deliver guidance counselling in a more collaborative way, in an effort to combat the challenges faced by guidance counsellors and students as a result of reduced hours and resources allocated.

Irish policy makers have supported the view that the whole-school approach is a “model of good practice in the delivery of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector” (DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012), and post-budget 2012 saw more emphasis being weighted on a whole-school approach in the delivery of guidance counselling. According to the NCCA (2017, p13), the “Whole-School Guidance” wheel conveys the “continuum of support model offered within a whole-school approach to guidance” (see Figure 1.3). A whole-school approach to guidance warrants collaboration in creating and delivering the whole-school guidance plan (DES 2009, 2012). According to the Teaching Council, there is an inherent expectation of teachers, to engage with each other in a manner that is “collaborative and supportive”, “developing and supporting good practice and maintaining the highest possible quality of educational experiences for pupils” (The Teaching Council, 2016, p8). Policy and professional practice literature suggest that engaging in professional collaboration is integral part of the work of an educator, be it school management, teachers and/or guidance counsellors. However, to date, there has been no research carried out on how guidance counsellors perceive the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peer teachers. Hence, the aim of this dissertation is to explore guidance counsellors’ narratives about their experiences of collaborating with school management and peer teachers. It examines their values and attitudes about collaboration; to what extent collaboration is effective or ineffective in achieving a whole-school approach to guidance counselling. It also considers the factors that influence professional collaboration from their perspective. Furthermore, this study aims to highlight the changes needed in policy and practice to support and increase collaboration in delivery of whole-school guidance in the post-primary sector.

The researcher has defined the primary research question as the following: From a guidance counsellor’s perspective, what is the reality of collaborative work with peer teachers and school management in achieving a whole school approach to guidance in the post primary sector?
This question aims to investigate whether or not Guidance Counsellors see their work as collaborative and whether or not collaboration is beneficial or ineffectual to their work on a professional and personal level. The secondary research questions of the study are:

1. What are guidance counsellors’ roles in relation to professional collaboration with peer teachers and school management in the post primary sector?
2. What type of collaborative work do they engage in?
3. Is collaborative work contrived or genuine in achieving the whole school approach and what are the implications of these findings for the guidance counsellor?
4. Do Guidance Counsellors feel supported in their work or is professional isolation, empathy fatigue and burnout a reality in the profession?

The Literature review is divided into three sections. The first section examines guidance counselling in the Post-Primary sector, with a particular emphasis on the policy and theory that accentuate the role and practice of the guidance counsellor, from both Irish and international perspectives. The second section focuses on the holistic vision of guidance counselling and the whole-school approach to guidance counselling, outlining policy, theory and practice relating to the implementation of a whole-school approach to guidance counselling in the post-primary sector. Section three defines professional collaboration in education and focuses on collaboration between guidance counsellors, school management and peer teachers, again relating to including Irish and international policy, theory and practice.

The methodology section outlines the researcher’s chosen paradigm of an interpretivist qualitative approach. McLeod states that qualitative research aims “to describe, explore and analyse the ways that people create meaning in their lives” (McLeod, 2015, p. 92). The subjective nature of this study justifies the use of semi-structured interviews because the interview process “marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data” and “sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.409). This approach allowed the researcher to co-construct meaning with participants about their experiences of collaboration with school management and peer teachers in their work. The research study included participants from a variety of post-primary settings. Three participants are currently working as guidance counsellors in mixed-gendered DEIS post-primary schools, while the other three participants are operating in voluntary secondary schools, one from an
all-girls school, one from an all-boys school and one from a mixed-gender school. The range of experience working as guidance counsellors ranged from two to eleven years, revealing a broad range of experience in the sector. Braun and Clarke’s six-stage model of thematic analysis was used to analyse data findings. The researcher outlines the process of coding data, delineating themes and conveying the finding of themes. Thematic analysis is a flexible and accessible tool of data analysis used in fields of counselling and psychotherapy, which is strongly interlinked in the area of guidance counselling. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.4) state that thematic analysis has the “potential to offer an affluent and detailed, yet multifaceted version of data”. Furthermore, the researcher discussed considerations relating to the validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethics.

Three overarching themes emerged from data analysis. These comprised of: 1. School Management’s Value of Guidance Counselling, 2. Peer Teachers’ Value of Guidance Counselling and 3. Guidance Counsellors attitudes towards Collaboration. Deriving from each overarching theme were four subthemes that dispensed further insight into the narratives of participants. The background information of participants are illustrated in Table 1, while Table 2 demonstrates the themes and subthemes that supported the findings.

The discussion chapter combines the findings of the study with the relevant literature discourse from chapter two. The researcher discusses how the findings correlate and/or dissociate from previous literature in the area of guidance counselling. The findings will suggest that collaboration is an integral and valued feature of guidance counselling from the participants’ perspectives in achieving the goals of whole-school guidance but there are many factors that influence to what extent collaboration can be achieved. There is a particular focus on school management’s value on guidance counselling, peer teachers’ value on guidance counselling and the necessary supports needed, both internal and external to achieve professional collaboration. It also alluded to the changes needed in policy and practice to support the delivery of guidance counselling.

The conclusion chapter offers key findings and conclusions in relation to the aims and objectives of the study. The researcher has outlined the strengths and limitations of the study as well as recommendations for policy and practice. Furthermore, it affirms areas that are in need of ongoing research. Finally, the researcher has reflected on the personal learning of undertaking the research study and highlights areas where bias was addressed throughout the process.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction:
The primary purpose of a literature review is to help readers understand the body of work on a particular topic, as well as informing readers of strengths and weaknesses in that research and identifying gaps in research that are in need of exploration (De Los Reyes & Kazdin, 2008). Thomas (2009) states that a literature review involves the examination and compilation of articles, journals, policy documents and literature on a particular research topic. Literature reviewing reduces reliance on one research study, where research findings could prove to be dissimilar in another study of similar background (Dunst, Trivette and Cutspec, 2002). The challenge of this literature review is to focus on literature relating to professional collaboration in the area of guidance counselling, with a particular emphasis on post primary education.

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first section examines the role of the guidance counsellor in the post primary education system, in Ireland and internationally. Section two is as an examination of holistic guidance counselling and the whole school approach to guidance counselling, while section three focuses on the professional practice of collaboration between guidance counsellors, peer teachers and school management, identifying the implications of the whole school guidance approach to guidance counselling in post primary education and the discoveries in relation this effectiveness or ineffectiveness of collaboration for the guidance counselling profession.

**Section 1: 2.0 Guidance Counselling in the Post-Primary Sector**

**2.1.1 Role of the Guidance Counsellor – the Irish and International views:**

According to Sheil and Lewis (1993), in official documentation, the role of the guidance counsellor is considered under three areas: the delivery of information about “educational, vocational, and career choices, appraisal and assessment, and counselling for those experiencing learning or personal difficulties” (Government of Ireland, 1992, cited in Sheil & Lewis, 1993, p8). International bodies such as the OECD (2004) and the European Union (2008) have reiterated the concept of the role of the guidance counsellor as one that ensures individuals’ educational and career decisions have been privy to up-to-date information and helping individuals to become “effective managers” of their learning and career paths (DES, 2009, p. iii). In the Irish context, Guidance counselling in schools comprises of “…personal and social, educational and career guidance delivered within a whole school context” (DES,
2016a, p7) and is delineated 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”. (DES, 2005a, p4). Similarly, the National Guidance Forum (NGF, 2007) states that the purpose of guidance counselling is to assist:

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

(NGF, 2007, p13).

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors state that there are seven areas of professional conduct for guidance counsellors in providing a guidance service, outlined in Figure 1.1 below.

![Figure: 1.1 “The Role of the Guidance Counsellor” (ICG, 2007, p10)](image)

These areas outlined in Figure 1.1 complement the expectations of the IGC and NCGE in relation to the delivery of Guidance Counselling in the post-primary sector, and indeed the adult guidance sector in Ireland.

Furthermore, the IGC (2016) have outlined expectations in relation to competency (see Figure 1.2). At the centre of the framework is the guidance counsellor (referred to as ‘self’), suggesting that the values, attitudes and qualities of the individual guidance counsellor serves as the basis of competent practice. The guidance counsellor’s theoretical knowledge and acquired skills base equip the guidance counsellor to perform core professional and practice
competencies. In addition to this, it is suggested that professional practice be further developed through engagement with continued professional development (CPD) and appropriate supervision.

Figure 1.2 “The Guidance Counselling Competency Framework” (IGC, 2016, p9).

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) redefined the profession of school counselling with a professional school counsellor role statement in 2004 (ASCA, 2004), the ASCA National Standards for School Counselling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997), and the ASCA National Model (2005). The hypothesis of the role of guidance counsellor is similar in the American education system whereby school counsellors “help all students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development and career development, ensuring today's students become the productive, well-adjusted adults of tomorrow” (ASCA, 2018, p1).

The ASCA National Model represents a comprehensive counseling program that focuses on program foundation, delivery, management, and accountability, while supporting students holistically in the academic, career, and personal/social domains.

(Reiner et al, 2009, p324).

However, in New South Wales in Australia, it is suggested that the role of the guidance counsellor is to “complement and enhance the work of teachers” and work on “strengthening schools’ student welfare provisions” as well as providing “counselling and psychological assessment of students with specific needs” (NSW, DOE, 2018, p3), suggesting that the guidance counselling is holistic in nature and the responsibility of the whole school, involving professional collaboration in responding to the holistic development of students. Similarly the IGC (2014) suggest acknowledges that an individual is “multidimensional” and a holistic approach to guidance should consider “all aspects of an individual’s needs - spiritual, emotional, mental as well as social, environmental and physical” (ICG, 2014, p3). This approach implicates
the whole school and therefore poses a critical question as to how effective or ineffective collaboration amongst guidance counsellors, teachers and school management is in the delivery of the guidance service in the post primary sector in Ireland.

Section 2: 2.2 Holistic Guidance Counselling & The Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling.

2.2.1 Holistic Guidance Counselling in Post Primary Education:

In the 1995 White Paper on Education, there is a clear expectation that all schools provide students with the opportunity to engage with guidance counselling and pastoral care (DE, 1995). In 2005, the Department of Education and Skills specifically “proposed that guidance was holistic and incorporated the three strands of ‘personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance’, and two specific activities of guidance and counselling” (DES, 2005b, p4). Since 1972, the DES have allocated guidance hours on an ex-quota basis, based on the set ratio of students to hours, which transpired into an allocation of 0.5 per 250 students, 1.0 for 500 students and 1.5 for 750 students or above (Hayes and Morgan, 2011, cited in Hearne, Geary and Martin, 2016, p.139). However, inconsistencies in how guidance was delivered was noted in the 1990s, which was duly addressed in 1991 whereby “half ex-quota post allocated to schools in the 350–499 student enrolment category’ (McCoy, S., Smyth, E., Darmody, M., & Dunne, A. (2006), p4, cited in Hearne et al, 2016, p.139). In 2012, budget cuts resulted in the re-allocation of guidance in post primary schools in Ireland, drastically affecting the delivery of guidance services in schools, with a particular reduction in one-to-one guidance counselling, which facilitated helping students with personal or social problems, connected to their wellbeing (Hayes and Morgan, 2011; ICG, 2016).

Gordan (2002) writes from a Canadian perspective in which she suggests that schools are:

Faced with the challenge of helping raise children and adolescents in increasingly demanding environments, educational systems around the world have altered their mandates to include programming that addresses the whole-person needs of students, including their academic, physical, psychological, and social needs.

This perspective suggests a holistic vision of education, assisting “the whole-person” (Gordan, 2010, p50), a demand that the guidance service in a school is expected to fulfil. Furthermore, Hidayat suggests that there is a need for a holistic approach to guidance counselling because “human problems, especially counselee are very large and complex, hence they cannot be solved partially”, therefore “cooperation, communication, and system support”, as well as openness of stakeholders is necessary for the “synergistic cooperation in dealing with the problems of the counselee” (Hidayat, 2016, p7). Hidayat also states that “through a holistic vision, all terms of the ability of individuals considered integrally, such as intellectual ability, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creativity, and spiritual” (Hidayat, 2016, p8). She affirms the concept of the holistic vision of guidance counselling as being more interdisciplinary, integrated and collaborative in nature because the counselee is going through the process of human development and must interact with their environment (Hidayat, 2016). This idea of human development and interaction with environment is linked with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System’s theory (1979), whereby interactions with one’s environment can have a major influence on a person’s development, socially, personally and vocationally and moreover Barnes’ social constructivist model, whereby students gain knowledge construction through activities and interactions with people such as professionals, teachers, parents and peers (Barnes, Bassot & Chant, 2011), stressing the importance of a holistic guidance counselling service that is interdisciplinary and collaborative in nature. Similarly, in career development theory, Savickas (2011b) takes into consideration the influence role models can have on a person’s career choices and students spend most of their time in education, with teachers, hence it could be argued that teachers’ potential influence stresses the important of collaboration with the guidance counsellor in providing a holistic guidance service for the benefit of the whole person.

Moreover, Hearne et al (2016) highlight the need for transparency about roles and responsibilities of staff members in relation to this holistic approach to guidance counselling because the ‘initiative may be seen as “everybody and nobody’s responsibility”’ (Barnes et al, 2011, p70, cited in Hearne et al, 2016, p140). According to Hayes and Morgan (2011, p8), in their research about the practice of guidance counselling in post primary schools in Ireland, they found that there “is not a shared understanding of what the counselling aspect of the role involves, either among guidance counsellors themselves or among the key stakeholders”, this later report specifically mentioned deputy principals and principals. Similarly, in Hearne’s
study (2012, p6) on “The Resilient Adult Guidance Practitioner”, it was found that “the constant need to educate staff of the guidance function is a repetitive feature” of the work of a guidance counsellor. In Malaysian based research, one counsellor commented on the lack of understanding of the multi-faceted nature of a guidance counsellor’s role: ‘I have to teach, organize counselling activities, write reports and collect fees. Actually, the teachers and school administrator don’t have a clear picture of what counselling is about’ (Low, Kok and Lee, 2013, p193). This raises the question of how roles and responsibilities in the school community are defined and distributed in relation to the guidance service so as to effectively provide a whole school holistic approach for the benefit of students and the wider community.

2.2.2 The Whole School Approach (WSA) to Guidance Counselling in Post Primary education:

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), created a pie chart explicating the concept of the whole school approach in providing access to and appropriate guidance. See Figure 1.3. “Whole School Guidance” conveys “the continuum of support model offered within a whole school approach to guidance” (NCCA, 2017, p13). It further implicates the concept of collaboration between the guidance counsellor, school management, peer teachers and staff, and external organisations in the “delivery of a wide range of activities and learning to support students’ personal and social, educational and career development” (NCCA, 2017, p13).
Similarly, according to the Department of Education in Western Australia, the whole school approach is described as the following:

A whole school approach is cohesive, collective and collaborative action in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and the conditions that support these.

(Department of Education Government of Western Australia, 2009, p.1)

The Education Act of 1998 (9c) states that schools must “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices” (Government of Ireland, 1998) and in the DES (2005a) circular document relating to the implications of the Education Act of 1998 (9c), it states that:

The guidance programme should draw on the expertise of the guidance counsellor/s who should be central to the process as well as all relevant management and staff.

(DES, 2005a, p.4)
The Education Act of 1998 (9c) responded to the concept of whole school guidance that was originally instigated in Irish policy discourse in 1992 through “Education for a changing world; green paper on education” (DES, 1992) and since then, a whole school approach to guidance counselling has been deemed by “Irish policy-makers as a model of good practice in the delivery of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector” (DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012, cited in Hearne & Galvin, 2015, p.229). This collaborative approach by the school community aims to create and deliver a whole school guidance plan that will support the needs of the students (Hearne & Galvin, 2015). This concept of whole school guidance has been reiterated through several policy documents such as “Guidelines for second level schools on the implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students’ access to appropriate guidance” (DES, 2005a), “Guidance provision in second level schools” (DES, 2005b) and “Looking at guidance; Teaching and learning in post-primary schools” (DES, 2009), in which collaboration and consultation with the main stakeholders (Board of Management, school management, guidance counsellors, teachers, parents and students) must form the compass of guidance planning (DES 2005a, 2005b, 2012, NCGE 2004). In particular, collaboration amongst guidance counsellors, school management, peer teachers and resource staff were deemed to have the most responsibility in relation to guidance planning and delivery (DES, 2009, 2012).

However, the importance of whole school guidance truly came into focus following revised staffing arrangements in 2012, which saw the removal of the ex-quota allocation for guidance counselling in post-primary schools (DES, 2012). The DES (2012b) circular stated that a Whole School Approach (WSA) to guidance was “established policy”, in which the roles and responsibilities of guidance counsellor(s), school staff and management was to be clearly defined in the school guidance plan. This response to 2012 budget cuts highlighted the necessity of collaboration between guidance counsellor, peer teachers and management in the delivery of the guidance service. Teachers were always expected to have a duty of care for students, described by Best (1990) as “loco parentis” when students are in their care, and this concept became a central point during the 2012 budget cuts, in which the then Minister of Education Ruairí Quinn suggested that this duty of care would supply the personal, social and vocational support that students required. The budgetary measures resulted in guidance counsellors carrying out classroom based subject teaching in addition to their guidance role (Hearne & Galvin, 2015), with one guidance counsellor stating in recent research that “Last year, 60% of my hours were taken and I had to go back into the classroom” (Leahy et al, 2016,
p7), while another respondent mentioned how her workload had “doubled” and that she was “completing all the work that used to be shared between guidance counsellors within the same timeframe” (Leahy et al, 2016, p.7). Similarly, another guidance counsellor expressed concern about how increased workload, with reduced guidance hours and combining this with classroom teaching is “degrading and diluting the work and role of the guidance counsellor” (Leahy et al, 2016, p.8). This acknowledgement of increased workload and dissatisfaction suggests a danger of professional burnout and/or empathy fatigue. Skovolt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) claim that dangers in “high-touch work are:

- the inability to say ‘no’ (the treadmill effect);
- dealing with an ‘ocean’ of stress emotions;
- the covert nature of the work;
- constant empathy and one-way caring;
- elusive measures of success; and
- regulation oversight and control by external unknown others” (cited in Hearne, 2012, p2). This raises the question of whether guidance counsellors are experiencing empathy fatigue and/or burnout as a result of budget cuts.

In response to re-allocation of hours, the Department of Education encouraged the delivery of the guidance service through a WSA, with increased use of ICT in the delivery of guidance as a pragmatic way of achieving the delivery of information, resulting in less one-to-one guidance (DES, 2012, cited in Hearne et al, 2016). The DES (2012) also proposed that “some of the curriculum elements of the planned guidance programme to be delivered through other teachers such as SPHE staff” (p5, cited in Hearne & Galvin, 2016). This echoes McGuiness’ work (1989), which suggests permeating guidance topics into academic curriculum, while Watkins (1994) suggests a “whole curriculum” approach in responding to the social and personal needs of students. Both McGuiness and Watkins are based on the humanistic perspective, a rationale that seeks to solve human problems in a logical way (Hobson, 2004), through a curricular based method.
A WSA was also introduced in Hong Kong in 1990 (Hong Kong Education Commission, 1990). Hui (2002) states that ‘guidance’ means offering guidance and assistance for the holistic development of the person, while “counselling” serves as a support when one is in personal crisis or a state of confusion. Despite separating guidance from counselling, the general concept of supporting the person’s development personally, socially, vocationally and academically is analogous to that of Western society (Hui, 2002).

However, Evans and Rallings (2013, p4) concluded in their research in the United Kingdom that “Face-to-face advice is vitally important for quality careers guidance to be provided effectively to young people”. The autonomy given to school management in the allocation of guidance since 2012 and the concept proposed by the DES for teaching staff delivering parts of the guidance curriculum emphasised the role of the teacher and school management in the delivery of guidance. Subsequent studies suggest that this approach has resulted in the decrease in the quality of guidance services in the UK (Ofsted, 2013), whereby it was concluded that

The changes in policy have resulted in a decline in provision for young people. The replacement of face-to-face services with remote online or telephone-based services is wholly inadequate”, particularly for students dealing with personal and social problems (Evans & Rallings, 2013, p4).

This view has been reiterated in the Irish context by the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (2013), where research found that there were reduced one-to-one counselling, which could have “far-reaching consequences for student welfare” (p27). Similar points of view were echoed by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors [IGC], 2013, 2014; Joint Managerial Board [JMB], 2012; National Centre for Guidance in Education [NCGE], 2013).

In the 2011 “Research on The Practice of Counselling by Guidance Counsellors in Post Primary School”, guidance counsellors did not “perceive themselves to be sufficiently supported in their work” (NCGE, 2011, p.7). Moreover, only 35% of respondents felt that the DES were supportive and that the counselling aspect of their work was “not formally recognised as part of the Whole School Process” (NCGE, 2011, p7). “63% of respondents” believed there to be a WSA to guidance counselling, however, “88% of the survey respondents were unaware of the presence of the school guidance plan” (Hearne et al, 2016, p98). The finding of this research begs the question as to whether guidance counselling is collaborative in nature in the post primary sector in Ireland. Is the whole school approach to guidance counselling, inclusive of
collaboration with peer teachers and school management, a concept only supported by policy documents, or is it functional and operational from guidance counsellors’ perspective?

**Section 3: 2.3 Guidance Counselling & Professional Collaboration in Post-Primary Education:**

**2.3.1 Professional Collaboration in Education:**

The WSA to guidance counselling can only be achieved through professional collaboration in post primary schools, and the main focus of this research is to comprehend the guidance counsellors’ view of professional collaboration as a means of providing a guidance counselling service. However, before examining guidance counsellors’ experience of collaboration, one must define what collaboration is. According to Appley and Windor (1977), collaboration can be defined as a:

relational system in which: 1. Individuals in a group share mutual aspirations and a common conceptual framework; 2. The interactions among individuals are characterized by ‘justice by fairness’; and 3. these aspirations and conceptualizations are characterized by each individual’s consciousness of his/her motives towards the other; by caring and concern for the other; and by commitment to work with the other over time provided that this commitment is a matter of choice.

(Appley and Windor, 1977, p281)

This definition of collaboration takes many important facets into consideration in relation to whole school guidance approach; individuals share “mutual aspirations” with other staff members under a common conceptual framework (Ibid, p281), which in the Irish context, the framework being a WSA to guidance counselling that provides ample opportunity for the holistic development of students. The concept of “justice by fairness” is one that is embedded in the Teaching Council code of conduct through the word ‘respect’ as one of the four key ethical values that underpin the professional conduct of all teachers. This puts an obligation on the profession to “demonstrate respect for spiritual and cultural values, diversity, social justice, freedom, democracy and the environment” (Teaching Council of Ireland, 2016, p6), not just when dealing with students but also in their work with colleagues and other staff members.

Appley and Windor’s suggestion that the collaboration involves individuals having a clear concept of what they are trying to achieve collectively and that mutual care and commitment is necessary to create professional collaboration. This model of collaboration is echoed in the Teaching Council code of conduct, in which teachers are expected to communicate “in a manner that is professional, collaborative and supportive” (2016, p7). This expectation of collaboration is further reinforced in part 6 of the Code of Conduct for Teachers (2016),
whereby it states that teachers should “work with teaching colleagues and student teachers in the interests of sharing, developing and supporting good practice and maintaining the highest quality of educational experiences for pupils/students” (The Teaching Council, 2016, p8).

Griffin, Jones, and Kilgore (2006) carried out qualitative research on pre-service special-education teachers in the US and their experiences and attitudes on their collaborative work with other school personnel and the study discovered that regular communication, shared concerns and goals, familial contribution, and positive collegiality and school environment affected school collaboration. On the other hand, obstacles to collaboration were the absence of common knowledge, understanding, expectations, role acuities, time restrictions, conflicting goals, and not carrying out agreed decisions (Griffin, Jones and Kilgore, 2006). The above research suggests parallels that are significant for guidance counsellors.

Collaborative work aims to provide the best possible holistic educational experience for students and epitomises the hypothesis of the whole school approach to guidance counselling. While the research cited above gives insight into professional collaboration in US schools, little research has been carried out about the nature of collaboration between guidance counsellors, peer teachers and school management in the Irish context, hence, this provokes the question of whether collaboration is genuine or contrived in providing a WSA to guidance. According to Datnow (2011, p148) “contrived collegiality is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable”. Datnow (2011) suggests that collaboration with these characteristics is not conducive to “meaningful or sustainable change” (Ibid, p148).

**2.3.2 Guidance Counselling and collaboration with peer teachers and school management:**

“Collaboration is seen as essential to the academic, career, and social/emotional development of students in the American educational system” (Gibbins, Diambra and Buchanan, 2010, p4). Allen (1994) argues that all educators are expected to improve their communication and collaboration skills for the betterment of students’ educational experience. The need for a collaborative and effective guidance counselling service must struggle in the midst of “A diminishing economic base in education, coupled with increased societal problems reflected in student needs and an era of educational reform” (Allen, 1994, p1), forcing schools to maximise their resources in response to the growing needs of students.
In “A holistic approach to school-based counselling and guidance services in Malaysia”, it is suggested that the need for collaboration between guidance counsellor and peer teachers because it helps the guidance counsellor create a “safe, nurturing and effective school environment that was conducive to students’ learning (Fagan & Wise, 2007, cited in Low, Kok and Lee, 2013, p194). One respondent stated that ‘teachers have the advantage of identifying students’ problems since they have to manage students’ inappropriate behaviours in the classroom’ (Low et al, 2013, p194), which is supported by Mitchell and Bryan (2007), who argue that because guidance counsellors do not have do not have daily interaction with students in the classroom, therefore the need for collaboration with peer teachers to develop a partnership program to support the needs of students is essential for an eclectic guidance service. This is particularly applicable to the Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme (2015) that aims to” enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students” (NCCA, 2017, p8), with a particular focus on PE, CSPE, SPHE and Guidance departments in “building a whole-school approach to wellbeing and a curriculum for wellbeing that is the responsibility of all and supports wellbeing for all” (NCCA, 2017, p28).

However, Fullen and Hargreaves (1992) suggest that effective collaboration can only exist if the school culture value it and considers it a norm. Their examination of collaboration falls under three headings: balkanisation, comfortable collaboration and contrived collegiality (Fullen and Hargreaves, 1992). Balkanisation refers to teachers that attach their loyalties and attachments to particular groups in the staffroom, forming a clique that is detrimental to whole school planning, and is in many ways more commonplace in post primary sector because of subject-department structures (Fullen and Hargreaves, 1992). This highlights a potential risk of isolation for the guidance counsellor, who does not form part of a particular subject department or is a lone ranger in the guidance department. Comfortable collaboration refers to the short term goals as opposed to the longevity of school planning and lacks depth and reflective practice. From a guidance counsellor’s perspective, this could result in a quick-fix approach to guidance related issues. Meanwhile, contrived collegiality can encourage guidance counsellors, peer teachers and school management to come together and work together in planning and collaborative initiatives, however, it can also become a “quick, slick administrative surrogate” for collaborative cultures (Fullen and Hargreaves, 1992, p79). This highlights the need for investigation into whether guidance counsellors perceive collaboration as balkanized, comfortable or contrived.
In 1993, the American Counselling Association, together with the ACA Counselling and Human Development Foundation launched the ‘Think Tank on Crisis in School Counselling’, which found that “Inter-association and/or interagency dialogue and collaboration” were “stressed as components of an effective comprehensive developmental counselling and guidance program” (Allen, 1994, p1). This view is also shared in Gibbons et al’s research (2010) on K-12 school counsellors in a south-eastern state in the US (equivalent of post-primary teachers in Ireland) on “School Counselor Perceptions and Attitudes About Collaboration” in which they state that “School counselors are charged with constructing collaborative relationships with stakeholders focused on academic success for all students” (Gibbons, Diambra and Buchanan, 2010, p2). Furthermore, the ASCA (American School Counselor Association) claim that school counsellors are not only activists for school reform, but also collaborative leaders, at the core of interactions between all stakeholders (ASCA, 2009). By building collaborative relationships, guidance counsellors can rally human resources to support the success for all students, regardless of cultural background and socio-economic status (Education Trust, 2003), a statement that is comparable to Fullen and Hargreaves’ view (1992) that “we must experiment and discover better ways of working together that mobilize the power of the group” (p17).

Bryan and McCoy (2007) carried out research exploring school counsellors’ participation in collaborative relationships, and stated “school climate, role perceptions, self-efficacy beliefs, attitudes, and perceived barriers related to collaboration all affected overall involvement in collaborative relationships” (cited in Gibbons et al, 2010, p5). Meanwhile, the ASCA (2009) examined school counsellor and principals relationships. The findings suggested that principals wanted quality of communication, while counsellors valued frequent communication; principals also valued “respect for their vision and goals, while counselors more often mentioned personal respect for themselves and their expertise” (ASCA, 2009, p4). Findings from this research suggest that lack of shared vision and trust, as well as time constraints were considered by both parties as the biggest barrier to collaboration between school counsellors and principals (ASCA, 2009). A lack of shared vision and trust could potentially lead to contrived collegiality or moreover, professional isolation. Fullen and Hargreaves (1992) argue that colleagues must support and value each other’s work, not just as a humanitarian exercise but because it has a positive impact on the whole school. However, if there is a lack of shared vision, as found by the ASCA in their study, Fullen and Hargreaves (1992) argue that
professional isolation can ensue and can cause “conservatism, and resistance”, as well as “competitiveness, defensiveness about criticism, and a tendency to hog resources”, which stifles the opportunity for improvement and new ideas (p11). They also suggest that isolation and individualism can be perceived as “armour”, their “protection against scrutiny and intrusion” (Fullen and Hargreaves, 1992, p56). Fullen and Hargreaves also acknowledge that individualism and isolation is often enabled by time constraints on the teacher, (or in this case, he guidance counsellor), findings that are reflected in ASCA study.

The ASCA National model (2005) states that the most important role a guidance counsellor has is to provide a service that responds to the social/emotional, academic and vocational/career needs of student. This role concept is parallel to that of the IGC’s definition of a guidance counsellor as one who must “engage in personal, educational, and vocational counselling with clients throughout the lifespan, in the particular circumstances of their life” (ICG, 2007, p5) and echoed by the OECD (2002, p2), whereby it states that guidance counselling are “services that assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers”. Gibbins et al (2010) argue that is it impossible for a guidance counsellor to achieve these goals without engaging in professional collaboration. Keys and Green (2005) claim that because guidance counsellors are trained to have good listening and communication skills, and training in group work, they are compatible to collaborative endeavours. However, to date in Ireland, there has been little empirical research on how guidance counsellors perceive the collaborative nature of their work with peer teachers and school management. Therefore, I have identified three gaps on current literature in Ireland about professional collaboration: 1. How do guidance counsellors perceive the collaborative nature of their work?, 2. Is collaborative work perceived by guidance counsellors as genuine or contrived in providing a holistic guidance service?, and 3. What are the implications of these findings for the guidance counsellor?

2.4 Conclusion:
The area of guidance counselling in post-primary schools demands professional collaboration amongst the key stakeholders, particularly with peer teachers and school management. There is recognition that the whole school approach to guidance is “a model of good practice” (DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012). National and international research and literature haven given recognition to societal changes that have out increased demands on schools and staff to provide a guidance service that meets the “whole-person needs”, using a holistic and WSA to guidance (DES,
2005b, Dryfoos, 1998; Gysbers, Lapan, & Blair, 1999; Nader, 1990, cited in Gordan, 2010, p50). The 2012 budgetary cuts to guidance counselling have further implicated the role of classroom teachers and school management in the delivery of the WSA to guidance counselling and the need for effective collaboration between guidance counsellors, peer teachers and school management in professional and supportive manner (Teaching Council, 2016). It is apparent from this literature review that the issue of collaboration is complex and one that has not been researched in the Irish context, hence the need for examination. The aim of this research is to explore how guidance counsellors perceive collaboration with peer teachers and school management in providing a holistic and whole school approach to guidance. Additionally, it aims to reveal whether or not guidance counsellors perceive collaboration as effective or ineffective and the implications it has for the delivery of guidance services in post-primary schools, as well as the possible inferences for the guidance counselling profession as a whole.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how guidance counsellors perceive the collaborative nature of their work with peer teachers and school management. Consequently, it aimed to give
insight into the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the whole school approach to guidance
counselling from the guidance counsellors’ perspectives and the implications of such findings.
This chapter outlined the methodology that fortifies the study. Identification of the primary and
secondary research questions, as well as an examination of the chosen research paradigm were
discussed. Justification for the use of the chosen paradigm, as well as the sampling method
were considered. Rationale of data collection method and analysis were considered and issues
such as validity, reliability, objectivity, as well as ethical issues formed part of the discourse.

3.1 Research Questions

McLeod (2011, p.25) states that the aim of phenomenology is to create “the exhaustive
description of the phenomena of everyday experience, thus arriving at the essential structures
of the ‘thing itself’, the phenomenon”. According to Yüksel and Yildirim (2015),
phenomenological research in education examines the experiences of people, their feelings and
perceptions of a particular phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenon was that of guidance
counsellors’ perceptions and experience of collaborative work with peer teachers and school
management. Previous research, as explored in chapter 2, focussed on areas of whole school
guidance and the role of the regular teacher in whole school guidance, however, the primary
aim of this research was on practitioners’ views. Research questions concentrated on the
thoughts, perceptions and feelings of practitioners in relation to collaborative work with peer
teachers and school management. They considered how effective or ineffective collaborative
work was in their role as guidance counsellors and in achieving a holistic whole school
approach to guidance counselling. They also considered the potential pitfalls of failed
collaboration on the practitioner and indeed the delivery of guidance in post primary schools,
as well as their thoughts on how to achieve genuine collaboration.

This dissertation, like any other had a primary research question. Hogan, Dolan and Donnelly
(2009) suggest that defining the primary research question can only be accomplished after
examination of relevant literature. Having examined the relevant literature, the researcher
defined the primary research question as the following: From a guidance counsellor’s
perspective, what is the reality of collaborative work with peer teachers and school
management in achieving a whole school approach to guidance in the post primary sector?
This question sought to investigate whether or not Guidance Counsellors viewed their work as collaborative and how it was either facilitating or impeding their work on a professional and personal level. The secondary research questions of the study were:

1. What are guidance counsellors’ roles in relation to professional collaboration with peer teachers and school management in the post primary sector?
2. What type of collaborative work do they engage in?
3. Is collaborative work contrived or genuine in achieving the whole school approach and what are the implications of these findings for the guidance counsellor?
4. Do Guidance Counsellors feel supported in their work or is professional isolation, empathy fatigue and burnout a reality in the profession?

Once the researcher had articulated the research questions, the research paradigm came into focus.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The word paradigm comes from the Greek word \textit{paradeigma}, meaning, in broad terms, a model that is unchanging (Thomas 2013). A paradigm is a model or belief system that influences how a person perceives an issue or topic. Robbins (2008) acknowledges that paradigms exist for a variety of topics such as religion and research. In relation to research, a paradigm refers to how a researcher performs investigations and how the data findings convey or explain phenomena (Thomas, 2009). According to Thomas (2013), critical thinking is essential for a successful research project and inherent to this is the concept of ontology and epistemology because they force the researcher to consider very deeply what they are asking in their research question but also how one will try to answer it. Therefore, the paradigm conveys the way in which the researcher will gather data and how they will use the data findings to convey phenomena (Thomas, 2009). This includes:

1. Ontology of researcher: the question of \textit{what} we are looking at.
2. Epistemology of researcher: \textit{how} we look at things. (Thomas, 2013)

These elements force the researcher to examine how they view knowledge and how they related themselves to knowledge. Furthermore, the researcher must consider the method they plan on using to obtain knowledge (Thomas, 2013).
3.3 The Interpretivist Paradigm

The research design frame was based on an interpretive qualitative study. McLeod states that qualitative research aims “to describe, explore and analyse the ways that people create meaning in their lives” (McLeod, 2015, p. 92). McLeod also acknowledges that qualitative research methods have become increasingly significant in counselling and psychotherapy research (McLeod, 2015), which is heavily interlinked with guidance counselling. The specific qualitative method of interpretivist semi-structured interviewing was justified in this research because the aim of the researcher was to co-create meaning from interviews about how guidance counsellors perceived the collaborative nature of their work with peer teachers and school management. The interview (see Appendix F) was also a flexible instrument for data collection because it enabled the researcher to gather information based on verbal and non-verbal channels.

According to Thomas, interpretivism is “interested in people and the way they interrelate – what they think and how they form ideas about the world” (Thomas, 2013, p.108). Therefore, this paradigm was suitable for this research because the topic of professional collaboration is subjective to human beings and in this instance, guidance counsellors, peer teachers and principals and their experiences in their work. The interview process “marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data” but rather communication that “sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.409). Previous Irish research carried out about the implications of post-2012 budget cuts on the allocation of guidance in the post primary sector (ASTI, (2013), IGC, (2013, 2014), JMB (2012) and NCGE (2013) were quantitative in design, hence they did not purport the thoughts, feelings and experiences of guidance counsellors in response to budget cuts, cuts that demanded a collaborative whole school approach to guidance. It was also important to note that at this time of reduction in resources, guidance counsellors were expected to coordinate the whole school approach to guidance. Hence, the researcher identified a gap in research whereby very little or no interpretive qualitative research had been completed, in the Irish context, of practitioners’ perspectives of collaborative work with peer teachers and school management in delivering a whole-school guidance service in post-primary schools.
This exploratory study aimed to allow practitioners to tell their stories as they gave their thoughts, feelings, experiences and actions in relation to their collaborative work (Thomas, 2013). The interpretivist approach is founded on the principle of an interest in people and how they think, act and construct ideas in their worlds, which are often complex. The researcher must observe perceptions, feelings and thoughts (Oakley, 2000) and engage with the participant’s world, listening to them but also observing their non-verbal communication to gain insight and understanding of phenomena. It is suggested that interpretivist researchers gain insight into reality through participants’ views and experiences based on their own background (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2011). An interpretivist approach is ordered around “semi-structured interviews, which are then transcribed and analysed in terms of emerging themes and categories” (McLeod, 2011, p. 147). Through this process, researchers should aim to achieve thick descriptions of participants’ experiences are developed through the observation, interaction and discourse of interviews (Thomas, 2009), which offer detailed insight into the perceptions of guidance counsellors in relation to professional collaboration in their work. Because the interpretivist approach is founded on the principle of an interest in people, Thomas (2013) suggests that the researcher must take into consideration the race, gender and religion of the participant, as well as acknowledging how the annotating of reality “goes on at one time in one place” and comparing it to “what goes on in different times and places” (Cohen et al, 2011, p.22). Thomas (2009) also states that the researcher should cultivate theory inductively through repeated observations and reflection of observations. However, it is important to test participants’ claims against knowledge, to avoid assumptions and diminish influence and prejudice (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

3.4 Access and Sampling of Research Participants

Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research because the researcher hand picks the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality” that is being sought (Cohen et al, 2011, p.156). Teddlie and Yu argue that purposive sampling is used to:

- achieve representativeness, to enable comparisons to be made, to focus on specific, unique cases, to generate theory through the gradual accumulation of data from different sources.


Therefore, for the purpose of this research project, the researcher adopted purposeful sampling of six guidance counsellors, of mixed-gender, for the interview process. According to Hogan et al (2009), purposive sampling is recruitment based on participants’ experiences and insights.
in response to the specific research study. The practitioners must be qualified and working
guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector. Robbins (2008) reminds us that researchers
do not have access to an entire population to which the study may relate, hence in choosing a
sample, researchers gain access to a representative subsection of the population. In order to
give insight into a representative subsection of guidance counsellors in the post primary schools
in the education system, the researcher aimed to interview practitioners from voluntary
secondary schools (single-sex and mixed gender schools), community schools and Deis
schools. However, while this sampling was suitable to the research project, it must not be
assumed that the findings represent the whole population of guidance counsellors in the post-
primary sector but may be typical of the sector at this time (Cohen et al, 2011). The interview
participants were made aware that the interview findings would only be used for the purpose
of research.

The researcher accessed the sample through the gatekeeper (the IGC branch chairperson),
requesting assistance in disseminating volunteer information letters and consent forms to
members of the branch at branch meeting. Volunteer participants then came forward at their
own discretion to partake. Once consent had been secured and procedures of the interview
process were explained to the participants, the interview process took place.

3.5 Data Collection: Qualitative Interviews
The researcher carried out face-to-face interviews with six guidance counsellors from a variety
of post primary settings, such as voluntary secondary school (single-sex and mixed) and DEIS
schools. The researcher believed that by interviewing guidance counsellors from a variety of
post-primary settings, it would give insight into the experiences of guidance counsellors’
collaborative work with peer teachers and management in delivering a whole school approach
to guidance, which may be similar or different, reflective or typical of the wider post-primary
sector, particularly in the dissemination of resources supporting guidance counselling in
particular types of schools.

The purpose of qualitative interviewing in this research was to encourage open and acquiescent
interactions between researcher and interviewee, providing the participant with the opportunity
to explain their thoughts and feelings (Thomas, 2013) in relation to their collaborative
experience with peer teachers and management in their work as guidance counsellors, and
whether or not they considered it to enhance or inhibit their work in providing a whole school
approach to guidance. The advantages of applying face-to-face interviews was that it allowed the researcher to gain insight from participant’s words but also their body language, facial expression, tone of voice, eye contact (Bell, 2010), as well as initial, immediate reactions to questions (Opdenakker, 2006). Bell and Waters (2014) argue that interviews allow the researcher to explore feelings and responses, something quantitative methods, for example, questionnaires cannot achieve.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

For the purpose of this research, the researcher completed semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F) with six guidance counsellors. The semi-structured interview approach for data gathering provided the opportunity for structure; questions were asked that cover a range of issues that derived from the pinnacle research question (see Appendix F), but it also allowed the freedom to expand or follow up on responses that were deemed interesting or relevant to the research topic (Thomas, 2013). The freedom for a certain amount of spontaneity allowed the interviewer to encourage elaboration from the interviewee and/or further clarification (Cohen et al, 2007). One of the main advantages of semi-structured face-to-face interviews is the adaptability and flexibility that they ensue. Interviews can be carried out in a variety of setting and the scope for gaining insight into a range of topics is infinite (Lindlcf and Taylor, 2011). Bell (2010) acknowledges that facial expression, intonation and eye contact can also give insight into the thoughts and feelings of participants, which assist in forming thick descriptions because it produces dialogue and discourse about a particular topic that quantitative methods cannot achieve. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews enables the researcher to clarify questions put to participant, where confusion or misunderstanding may have arisen (Robbins, 2008). The researcher, however, must be mindful of how he/she clarifies questions for the participant in an attempt to avoid inconsistency throughout the interviews, because it may influence understanding and indeed the responses of participants (Robbins, 2008).

While there are many advantages to using semi-structured interview, the researcher must also acknowledge the disadvantages. Richman et al (1999), acknowledges that social desirability may become an issue; whereby participants respond in a manner that they believe the researcher wants, to which Robson (2002) refers to as the “good bunny syndrome”, presenting socially desirable answers as opposed to their genuine thoughts and feelings on the topic and potentially affecting the reliability of data. Silverman (1993) also suggests that the disadvantage of interviewing is that it may only expose how people perceive incidents and not
necessarily how they perform in incidents that occur. However, despite possible disadvantages of semi-structured interviewing, the researcher believed that this data collection methods allowed the researcher to co-construct meaning about guidance counsellors’ perceptions of collaboration in their work and the researcher believed that quantitative methods were not conducive to co-constructing and creating thick descriptions, which was appropriate for this research study.

3.6 Data Analysis:
Data analysis had to be considered. According to Merriam, “the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your research questions” (Merriam, 2009, p.178). While the constant comparative method can be very useful, construct mapping or theme mapping was most suitable for the purpose of this research. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.4) state that thematic analysis offers flexibility and has the “potential to offer an affluent and detailed, yet multifaceted version of data”. According to McLeod (2011, p.145), “a theme is a recurring pattern, which conveys something significant about what the world (or a particular aspect of the world being discussed) means to a person”. He also argues that identifying themes and showing how they are interlinked it is “primary goal of qualitative inquiry” (Ibid, p.145). Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis approach is flexible and accessible and used in several investigations in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Thematic analysis involves extracting themes from the transcripts of interviews and aligning quotations that may be either comparative or contrasting to a theme. The predominant theme underpinning this analysis was professional collaboration.

The interviews were then transcribed and analysed through extraction of emerging themes (Smith et al, 2009). The researcher believed that the thematic analysis approach was suitable to this study because it provided an opportunity for “theoretical freedom”; thematic analysis was “compatible with essentialist and constructionist paradigms within psychology” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p82). Furthermore, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p82), “thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data.

The researcher then transcribed the interview, which Riesmann (1993) claims is the best way for researchers to become familiar with the data findings. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there is a 6-phase guide to apply the thematic analysis approach.

1. Phase 1: Becoming familiar with the data: Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the researcher “immerse” themselves in the data and become familiar with the “depth and
breadth of the content” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p93). Transcription of interviews was part of the first phase.

2. Phase 2: Generating initial codes: Once the researcher had read and familiarised themselves with data, they created initial codes about what they found interesting. This consisted of the “most basic segment, or element, of raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding a phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p63). Braun and Clarke recommend that the researcher code “as many potential themes/patterns as possible”, as well as keeping note of “surrounding data” if necessary so as to avoid loss of context and individual extracts may be uncoded, coded one or several times, which eventually create a thematic map (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p96).

3. Phase 3: Searching for themes: This phase involved collating codes into possible themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that the researcher collate codes into piles that may fit into an over-arching theme. From this, some codes could potentially become main themes while other codes may become sub-themes. Consequently, codes that did not fit into a thematic category were aside either temporarily. This phase also involved gathering all data that was relevant to each possible theme.

4. Phase 4: Defining and naming themes: During this phase, the researcher read and examined each coded extract again and deciphered whether they formed a rational pattern that fitted into an existing theme or whether they was a need for them to be re-allocated or disregarded from the analysis (Level 1). Once the themes had been established, level 2 of this phase was carried out, which involved checking the validity of themes in relation to the entire data set and whether the “thematic map” accurately reflected implications of the data as a whole (Ibid, 2006).

5. Phase 5: Defining and naming themes: This phase involved continuous analysis to refine themes; developing an overall narrative of what the analysis told. The researcher then generated distinct definitions and names for each theme.

6. Phase 6: Producing the report: This marked the final chance for analysis. The researcher chose a selection of “vivid” and “compelling extract examples” and carried out a final analysis of selected extracts (Ibid, 2006, p112). This phase also required the researcher to relate back the selected extracts to the primary research question and literature and produce an academic report of the analysis.

The researcher adopted a thematic analysis approach using the 6 phase model outlined and it was hoped that the emerging themes of the interview process would inform policy and practice of guidance counselling in relation to the whole school approach to the delivery of guidance.
3.7 Validity

Validity and reliability of the research was also a key issue. According to Cohen et al, “In qualitative data, the subjectivity of the respondents, their opinions, attitudes and perspectives together contribute to a degree of bias” (Cohen et al, 2011, p.179), hence Gronlund argues that validity should only be seen as a degree rather than an “absolute state” (Gronlund, 1981, cited in Cohen et al, 2011, p.179). For the research to be valid, the researcher had to be very vigilant of their bias in relation to the topic and represent the data from the respondent’s point of view rather than the researcher’s point of view. Geertz describes this as seeing and reporting the situation through the eyes of the participants (Geertz, 1974, cited in Cohen et al, 2011). The context of the research must also be clear and the data should be descriptive, be honest, have depth and richness (Cohen et al, 2011). It was also necessary that the research study did “not imply that the findings [could] be generalized to other populations or settings” (Morrow, 2005, p.252). The researcher adhered to specific procedures to ensure validity such as: checking transcripts for accuracy, by maintaining accurate coding when adopting thematic analysis and clarifying the bias that the researcher was bringing to the study. This was achieved through reflexive action, whereby the researcher acknowledged how their interpretation was influenced by their personal circumstances such as culture, gender etc. By acknowledging bias, the researcher was conscious and proactive in becoming an objective researcher. Moreover, generating data from the relevant sample was necessary to ensure validity.

3.8 Reliability

Reliability, on the other hand, was concerned with the consistency and dependability of the research. For research to be deemed reliable, it must convey that if it were used again with a similar sample in a similar context, the results would be very similar (Cohen et al, 2011). To certify reliability, the researcher will carried out a pilot interview with a guidance counsellor from a similar context to one of the sample (e.g a guidance counsellor from the post primary sector) and compared the coding of responses to the subsequent interviews but also ensured the content of interview questions included open ended and impartial questioning (see Appendix F).

3.9 Reflexivity

Reflection was required of qualitative researchers throughout the process of research. By reflecting throughout the process, the researcher provided the reader with context and insight.
Researchers’ backgrounds, views of research questions and paradigm can influence research, hence it is important that researchers acknowledge their position in the research and their views in relation to the milieu they are investigating (Cohen et al, 2007). Patton (2002) reiterates this point that reflexivity provides the researcher with the opportunity to reflect on how their personal experiences impact on the research process. Therefore, in this case, the researcher examined how their position as a trainee guidance counsellor working in a post-primary school and assumptions they may have had about the guidance counselling profession in the post-primary sector. The researcher in this study acknowledged that they believed the guidance counselling profession to be stressful and that guidance counsellors were dealing with increased workloads, suggesting that professional collaboration is lacking between peer teachers and school management, which defeats the purpose of a whole school approach to guidance. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledged that despite having these assumptions, one was aware that by entering the research process in this manner, the researcher would encounter the personal experiences, thoughts and feelings of the participants, something they had not been privy to before.

For the purpose of reflexivity, the researcher kept a reflective diary (see Appendix H), which included thoughts, hypotheses and assumptions about the work of a guidance counsellor within the whole school framework and in relation to collaboration amongst peer teachers and school management. It was the researcher’s intention to monitor observations, thoughts and experiences throughout the interview process and indeed changing views thereafter. By acknowledging the researcher’s position throughout the process, the aim was to reduce bias and influence on the research study.

3.10 Ethical Issues
According to Hesse-Bieber & Leaveym (2006), researchers need to anticipate ethical issues that may evolve as a result of the research (cited in Creswell, 2009). In relation to research, ethics is concerned with the conduct, behaviours and decision making of the researcher and how it affects others. It is imperative that researchers “protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organisations or institutions” (Creswell, 2009, p.87). Thomas (2009) reminds us that what the researcher might want and what is right for participants could differ. Cohen at al (2007) advises that carrying out research in educational institutions can be complex and difficult to anticipate issues, especially in relation to qualitative
research. There were several ethical issues that the researcher considered. Furthermore, it was advised that ethical issues could be equivocal and should be considered in terms of the research context.

Cohen at al (2007) discusses ethical regulation under the following three headings:

1. Institutional Ethics: University of Limerick’s EHS Faculty gave ethical approval to research study on 2nd February, 2018.

2. Professional Body’s Ethics: As a member of the IGC, the researcher is compelled to follow the Code of Ethics set out by the professional body, which also applies to research, states that one must:
   - Respect the rights of the client (the interview participants),
   - Act in a trustworthy, reputable and honest manner and avoid doing harm,
   - Follow ethical procedures when faced with a dilemma,
   - Promote honesty and integrity in the profession. (IGC, 2012).

3. Personal Ethics: Thomas (2009) suggests that the researcher should continuously reflect on their practice within research, questioning thoughts, behaviour and actions when interacting with participants, as well as reflecting on the research subject. This reflective action was achieved through consistent journaling throughout the process, acknowledging any ethical issues that arose throughout the research process (see Appendix H).

The researcher must acknowledge that interviews have an ethical element; “they produce interpersonal interaction and produce information about the human condition” (Cohen et al, 2007, p.382). One can identify three key areas of ethical consideration when carrying out interviews: 1. “Informed consent”, 2. “Confidentiality” and 3. “Consequences of the interviews” (p.382).

Firstly, the issue of informed consent was paramount to the successful completion of data collection. The researcher accessed the sample through the IGC branch chairperson, seeking permission and assistance in disseminating information letters and consent forms to potential participants. Prior to the interview process, the researcher gained written consent from the
participants, as well as informing participants of the use and intended value of the research, the ownership of data and the terms of participation (location, time, opt-out clause etc).

The topic of professional collaboration could invoke a personal response from participants of isolation, feeling undervalued, overworked or burnt-out in their work, or the participant may disclose painful memories or experiences that they had never intended to reveal (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, they may feel that the interview is invading their privacy. This could potentially be distressing for the participant and the researcher had an ethical responsibility that the questions in the interview were not invasive, and adequate value had been placed on ethical considerations prior to research process. A duty of care to the participant was the principle concern during and after the interview (Bond, 2004). It was also vital that the researcher respected the confidentiality of the participant and explained the limitations of confidentiality and how the researcher planned to retain confidentiality (Cohen et al, 2007). Mertens (2010, p.342) states that the data that participants give should be “handled and reported in such a way that they cannot be associated with them personally”. For example, the use of pseudonyms and not exposing the intimate details of their place of employment but rather giving a general contextual description sufficed. One also had to bear in mind the time constraints of the research process and indeed of the participant. An opt-out clause was operated to any point before the interview commenced and indeed after the interview had begun, should the participant become distressed or ill and unable to continue. The researcher advised participants, prior to the interview process, to engage in supervision or other supports should they find the interview topics distressing. Finally, the researcher took into consideration relevant laws such as the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act in relation to data and confidentiality. Coaley (2010) reminds the researcher of locking data in storage and ensuring that only permitted persons have access to data; the investigator and research supervisor, which was stated clearly in the information letter and consent forms signed by participants (see Appendix B).

3.11 Conclusion
This chapter outlined the methodology that supports this research study. The primary and secondary research questions were outlined as well as justification of the use of the interpretivist paradigm and the phenomenological approach. A critical analysis of the chosen qualitative data collection method of semi-structured interviews and the approach to data analysis, as well as discourse about access of sampling, validity, reliability, reflexivity and
Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter conveys the main findings of the research project pursued and delineated by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis approach. The researcher has found that three overarching themes and four sub-themes were found through data analysis. The purpose of this research was to gain insight about how guidance counsellors perceive collaboration with peer teachers and school management. The research aimed to acquire an understanding of guidance
counsellors’ opinions and experiences of collaboration in relation to achieving a whole school approach to guidance counselling, what collaborative work they engage in and whether they feel collaborative work is an integral part of their role. The researcher also wanted to discover the extent to which guidance counsellors working in the post-primary sector feel supported in their work and whether they believe professional isolation, empathy fatigue and burnout to be a reality in this profession. Through the interview process, the researcher wanted to co-create meaning with guidance counsellors that could potentially inform policy and practice in relation to the guidance services in the post-primary sector.

This chapter is divided into several sections. Firstly, the researcher has outlined the guidance counsellors’ profiles who took part in the research in outlined in Table 1. The researcher also outlined the context of each guidance counsellor, using pseudonyms. The second section outlines a hierarchy table (see Table 2) of the overarching themes and sub-themes found in participant interviews. Three overarching themes were found: 1. School Management’s value of Guidance Counselling, 2. Peer Teachers’ value of Guidance Counselling, and 3. Guidance Counsellors’ attitudes towards collaboration. Within each theme, there are four sub-themes that emerged and are discussed concurrently. Excerpts from each guidance counsellor are included under each emerging theme and sub-theme.

### 4.1 Background

The participants of the research involved six guidance counsellors; two males and four females, ranging from mid-twenties to late thirties. The range of their experience varied from two years to eleven years of experience working as a guidance counsellor in the post-primary sector. One guidance counsellor reported having two years’ experience. Two guidance counsellors had four years’ experience, one had six years’ experience, another had eleven years’ experience and finally one had ten years’ experience. Three participants worked in DEIS co-educational post primary schools, one worked in an all-girls voluntary secondary school, one in a co-educational secondary school and one in an all-boys secondary school. All participants have worked as guidance counsellors in voluntary secondary schools on previous occasions. Table 1 below depicts a precis of the participant profiles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Carla</th>
<th>Darren</th>
<th>Chloe</th>
<th>Trish</th>
<th>Tom</th>
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<table>
<thead>
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<td>6 years</td>
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<td>Co-Ed</td>
<td>All-Boys</td>
<td>Co-Ed</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>No. of hours on timetable</td>
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<td>22 hours</td>
<td>3 hours 20 minutes</td>
<td>22 hours</td>
<td>18 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.2 Study Findings

Three overarching themes emerged from the data. Four sub-themes underpin each overarching theme, which is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2:
4.3 Theme 1: School Management’s value of Guidance Counselling

This theme conveys the agreement by all guidance counsellors interviewed that school management’s value on guidance counselling has a profound effect on the guidance service in their post-primary school and on their ability to collaborate in achieving an effective whole school approach to guidance. There were four sub-themes that underpinned this theme, which were discussed consecutively.

4.3.1 Allocation of Hours
The participating guidance counsellors stated that management’s perception and value of guidance counselling greatly influenced the hours allocated to the guidance service. All participants stated that the cut of ex-quota allocation of hours to guidance in budget 2012 had a major impact on how the guidance service was run. Allocation of guidance hours was at the discretion of school management and the value that management placed on guidance became a pinnacle factor in how the guidance service was managed.

**Laura:** “I think there has to be something set in stone that [hours] it’s not at the discretion of management, because that is where the inconsistency and incoherency is, I find. I have worked in other schools within the profession, where there was a lot more leeway and a lot more value put on the role of Guidance Counselling.”

**Carla:** “It’s at the discretion of management to decide how much time specifically they’re going to give to guidance and I think a lot of Principals, if they feel, look… if we’ve ticked a box, we’ve covered it. But maybe to above and beyond that, and maybe realise, okay, actually, you know, we need more than just the minimum hours”.

**Darren:** “I have been in school where it isn’t valued and I’m in school now where it is… if management are willing to give it hours and time and support, it’s something that really can kind of flourish or you know the role of the guidance counsellor is very obvious”.

**Chloe:** “It goes back to 2012, put back in the guidance counsellors. Don’t leave it up to management because there will always come the year that there will be something else that needs [hours]… they’ll be eroded from guidance”.

One participant acknowledged how management’s value of guidance has directly influenced the hours allocated to guidance, while another participant acknowledged that despite the cut to hours in 2012, management’s value of guidance protected her hours.

**Tom:** “I think he really values guidance counselling. That’s evidenced by the fact that he has taken on two other people in it. We’ve gone from one to three. We’ve doubled our hours.”

**Trish:** “I was very lucky that the hours weren’t ever taken from me, which again is another example of support shown by management.”
This highlights how the value that management place on guidance counselling directly affect how the guidance service functions and how perhaps this can differ in schools. Some participants acknowledged that management’s lack of value on guidance caused a reduction in hours or guidance services, while others acknowledge that placed value on guidance is directly evident on the timetable and indeed the whole school guidance initiatives that are facilitated by management.

4.3.2 The Influence School Management’s Perception of Guidance has on Teachers.

Through the interview process and data analysis, it became evident that school management’s value and perception of guidance greatly influenced how guidance was perceived and supported by peer teachers, hence directly affecting collaboration, particularly in relation to achieving a whole school approach to guidance.

*Darren:* “If the environment created in the school towards guidance is positive from management down... if management are behind it, I feel as if teachers generally get behind it too”.

*Trish:* “Yes, I think guidance is seen as something of a priority. It is prioritised and seen as something very important by school management. In terms of colleagues, yes I also think it is [valued]”.
One of the participants stated that guidance “hasn’t been valued” by school management, hence the researcher asked her about whether the school management’s view of guidance has influenced peer teachers. Her response reiterated the concept that school management have greatly influenced how teaching staff view guidance and whether it is valued and supported.

Chloe: “It’s not being done, but again it’s not the teacher’s fault. It’s not coming from management to do a whole-school approach”.

The researcher found that where guidance counsellors’ expressed that school management did not value guidance counselling, this value system transferred to the wider school community, in particular to teaching staff. In turn, there are consequences whereby there is a lack of understanding about the role of guidance counselling.

4.3.3 Management’s perceptions and expectations of Guidance Counsellors’ role.

School management’s perception of the role of a guidance counsellor differed, in some cases, from the guidance counsellor’s view of their role. One guidance counsellor stated that her view of the role and management’s view of the role differed and put constraint on her work, while the other discussed how the focus in her school is purely on classroom and mostly vocational guidance.

Laura: “The element of personal counselling should be referred out [according to her management]; however, the element of vocational guidance is very much supported and facilitated in the school...” “There is a big expectation from management that you outsource” (in relation to counselling aspect of work). “However, I don’t agree with it. I think that the counsellor should be able to deal with and support students where necessary...”

Chloe: “That’s all vocational guidance. I’ve no time for one-to-one allocated on my timetable.” “But they [school management] never, kind of, thought, what if something [personal] came up for some of these kids in these classes... next thing I am slotting them into my free 2.20 class on a Tuesday because we’re talking about anxiety and something triggered, I do a one-to-one session with him then. Again, outside of my hours. You know so, there wasn’t much forward planning done with my timetable anyway... was it ticking a box because they knew I’d do the work?”
Other participants discussed how their management valued one-to-one guidance, personal/social counselling more than vocational guidance.

Carla: “We’re in a position at the moment, where we kind of have to borrow classes because the girls don’t have career classes”... “the amount of personal counselling... that kind of, side of it can be very time consuming, which often leads, means the more career orientated initiatives don’t get as much time as they should”.

One Guidance Counsellor also stated that she found it difficult to deal with management’s dissimilar view of guidance in some ways.

Laura: “I find sometimes that it can be challenging trying to manage managements’ expectation...they have an alternative view on the role of guidance... being timetabled for a business subject LCVP is not to my strength... it would be more beneficial to be actually timetabled for guidance classes which was taken away from me in fifth year”.

Tom: “In my last job... the principal... felt that guidance counsellors were really important for lots of aspects for the life of the school... her leadership style was about developing capacity in the staff for collaboration...”

“Our [current] Principal wouldn’t... he wouldn’t trust us as much as she would have... he needs to have his hands in everything. And therefore it’s collaboration but at a very low level”.

One participant stated how he dealt mostly with the personal/social guidance counselling in the school but the researcher noted that the other guidance counsellor in this school focused on delivering one-to-one and classroom vocational/educational guidance. However, both guidance counsellors worked collaboratively in delivering whole school initiatives related to all areas of guidance.

Darren: “I have eighteen hours of [personal] counselling and then three hours of guidance classes”.

4.3.4 Facilitation of Collaboration in relation to Whole School Guidance.
For collaboration to be achieved, the participants also expressed how management influence whether collaboration can be achieved in relation to achieving a whole school approach to guidance. One guidance counsellor spoke about how management have created a limited ability for the guidance counsellor to collaborate with other relevant subject departments such as SPHE, SEN and LCVP due to timetabling issues, while others discussed how they were encouraged to collaborate with management in relation to pastoral care issues and in the planning of career events and initiatives, which in turn, facilitate collaboration, particularly where the whole school is involved.

Chloe: “No. Because we don’t have a time, for example, for the SPHE, LCVP, the SEN teachers, Like, we don’t have the time to meet or we’re not allowed time off” [to collaborate] “... and the LCVP is timetabled at the same time as guidance... so there’s not a whole lot of collaboration”.

Carla: “I suppose when you are looking at whole-school initiatives, like career initiatives, or mental health initiatives, you do need to involve the wider school community...” “it probably starts with me and then maybe it’s to work with management... proposing what you want to do with management, and them supporting you in that role... that they are willing, I suppose, and able to make it happen”.

Trish: I’m grateful and I feel blessed in terms of support shown to me by management... I attend two weekly [pastoral care] meetings with management, one for junior school and one for senior school... I can also call on my Principal or my Deputy”. “This year we’re rolled out a whole-school school study skills programme... so, that is very much an example of it being implemented by everybody.

Tom: I wouldn’t really have seen a student [for a personal counselling session] until we brought the referral to the care team meeting”.

Trish also spoke about how she has regular meetings with the SEN co-ordinator, and is afforded the opportunity to communicate with staff through staff meetings which is facilitated by management and she felt that “that in itself does increase and encourage collaboration”.
Tom: “The first thing we did was set up a care team... management gave up great support. Our deputy gave up great support at the time. She’s a former guidance counsellor herself”.

Through exposure of guidance counsellors’ narratives, it has become clear that school management’s value of guidance either enables or disables the guidance counsellor’s ability to collaborate with peer teachers on vocational/educational guidance initiatives. Indeed, peer teachers’ willingness to engage in guidance related activities largely depends on whether or not management make it a priority.

4.4 Theme 2: Peer Teachers’ Value of Guidance Counselling

Similarly to that expressed of school management, the narratives of the participants highlighted the influence peer teachers’ value of guidance counselling can have on their ability to collaborate and achieve a whole school approach to guidance. Underpinning this theme, there are four subthemes that inform this discourse.

4.4.1 Teachers’ understanding of the Role of Guidance Counsellor

The participants involved in this student expressed differing views of the teacher’s understanding of their role, which consequently effected their engagement in collaboration and support with the guidance service and whole school initiative related to guidance.

Chloe: “They [teaching staff] are constantly coming to me looking for a photocopy of something to do with study skills and I’d say ‘I can do that with them’... ‘oh can you? I didn’t know you could’, you know, they’re not aware... No, there is no awareness”.

Trish: “There are a certain number of teachers that at given stage would see their job very much within the boundaries of their classroom, but I think the vast majority and in actual fact, I can say with confidence, I think all our staff would see guidance for students, the pastoral care, the support of students, guiding them in making the right choices around subject choice, educational choices; all of that is something that we share amongst the entire teaching body.”
Darren: “I can see how, kind of, everyone is aware of what’s been done in the department and like, kind of happy to support it”.

The understanding, or lack thereof, of the role of guidance counsellors had implications for engagement in the collaborative process of whole-school guidance because if there is a lack of awareness, genuine collaboration cannot take place.

4.4.2 Awareness of Teacher roles in Whole School Approach to Guidance

One guidance counsellor acknowledged how some teachers see certain guidance related activities as part of their role and seek support from the guidance counsellor in achieving certain elements of guidance related activities, for example subject choice.

Carla: “Teachers in particular subjects, just kind of take ownership of their subject or talk to students I suppose and career paths available from those particular subjects... I know they kind of ask me for lots of posters... that they put on their notice board in their classroom... to relate what [they] are doing in class with what potential careers [they] could go into”.

One guidance counsellor spoke about how teachers may not be aware of how the whole school guidance plan but may be already be engaging in whole school guidance, without actually realising it.

Tom: “For the whole school, if you were to go and ask, like the English teacher today, what’s in the whole-school guidance plan, no they would not [know]... “Every member of staff plays a role, has a role to play in guidance. Do they know they are actively contributing to whole-school guidance when they do it, I would say no”... “we’re trying to make it very visible and evident as to the role that staff play in whole-school guidance, without them feeling it’s an extra burden.”

One guidance counsellor was asked whether she felt the whole-school guidance plan was being effectively implemented by school management and peer teachers, to which there was a resounding no in response. Another guidance counsellor suggested that whole-school guidance was being implemented by teachers in some capacity but questioned its consistency, suggesting
to the researcher that there is perhaps a lack of awareness from teachers about their role in whole-school guidance.

Chloe: “No, it’s not. It’s a piece of paper, it’s there. It ticks a box.”

Laura: “Well, I think there is an approach there... but how consistent.”

4.4.3 Areas of Collaboration between Teachers and Guidance Counsellors.

The participants of the study identified several areas in which they continuously collaborate with peer teachers in their school. In some schools, depending on the value for guidance counselling, collaboration was sometimes limited and in other cases, a genuine effort to collaborate was evident.

Laura: “I think the only departments that may be…. That may be aware of how their departments may facilitate or link with guidance would be the RE department... SPHE department”... “I also collaborate with the Further Education, the PLCs... I also collaborate with the business department in facilitating students in terms of preparation for interviews and the LCVP programme.”

Carla: “The way the timetable is structured here, like it would be the RE department I lean a lot upon... where we kind of have to borrow classes because the girls don’t have a careers class in 6th year”.

Darren: “I suppose the department that you might have the most, kind of, contact with might be SPHE or wellbeing now”.

Chloe: “I teach religion and I suppose that’s why I went and got qualified [in Guidance]... so I would... have collaborated a lot with the religion programme... [programmes] that we can implement through the religion class; and trying to get strands of the guidance programme in... through religion”.

Other Guidance counsellors in this study acknowledged that they would collaborate predominantly with particular subject departments, such as SPHE and SEN. They also stated that they collaborated with all subject departments at different times during the year, particularly in relation to vocational guidance and career related initiatives such as subject choice, college awareness week, mental health week. Another acknowledged that because they have a lot of guidance classes, there is not the same reliance on teaching departments to
facilitate guidance but stated that a referral system from teachers was invaluable in supporting students with personal counselling needs. The latter was referred to by another guidance counsellor also.

**Trish:** “You know, our study skills, our subject choice, our education and guidance, that’s something that’s across all subject departments.”

**Tom:** “Maybe you could say that sometimes you work with the SPHE teacher but that mightn’t fit with our own timetable, because we’ve got a good few classes ourselves”...

“Teachers all know how to refer and may that be for personal/social or educational or any support whatsoever... we collaborate on everything we do”.

**Carla:** “I suppose people, as well in the pastoral care team, would get a lot of... tip-offs from colleagues that would maybe notice students that were struggling in the classroom and that they’re not shy making referrals to you”.

It became evident to the researcher that guidance counsellors collaborated with teaching staff, especially in relation to gaining access to students for personal counselling. There was also increased emphasis on collaboration with peer teachers in the delivery of guidance in schools where guidance classes were not in existence on the timetable. This was particularly evident during pivotal points in vocational guidance throughout the school year, such as CAO application time. The researcher found that guidance counsellors’ perspective of what qualified as collaboration varied in the narratives of participants; some guidance counsellors considered collaboration to be simply gaining access to students for appointments and receiving referrals, while others engaged with teachers in all aspects of the guidance programme.

### 4.4.4 The factors that influence teachers’ engagement with Whole School Guidance

Some of the participants in the study suggested that teachers’ engagement with whole-school guidance depended on their previous experience of guidance. This is largely influenced by management’s value of guidance, which the research findings have already exposed and also how teachers perceive their role in guidance. However, it became evident that assumptions and
previous experience of guidance have affected whether or not teachers actively engage with the whole school approach to guidance.

Tom: “One of the aspects at the time, there were probably people in positions... whose work ethic may not have been the most magnificent and may have given a bad reputation to guidance counsellors... it was perceived like sure guidance is semi-cushy”.

Carla: “You can still get quite negative buy-in from some, maybe colleagues that don’t really understand what you do. You’re really that person that has an office and just maybe goes in and doesn’t do a whole pile in a day”.

Chloe: “So, in the past they [colleagues] would have, I suppose, looked at guidance as a handy way out.

There are many facets that influence a teacher’s perception of guidance counselling and ultimately decide whether or not they value guidance and engage in collaboration in achieving a whole-school approach. Teachers’ understanding of the role of guidance counselling, their role in whole-school guidance, their exposure to collaboration and their previous experience and assumptions of guidance counselling form the crux of achieving meaningful and genuine collaboration.

4.5 Theme 3: Guidance Counsellors’ attitudes towards Collaboration

There are four subthemes that truss this theme; 1. The Role of Collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective, 2. How Guidance Counsellors can increase Collaboration, 3. Limitations for Collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective and 4. The Guidance Counsellor’s view of Whole-School approach to Guidance. It is endeavoured that through exposure of these findings, that the researcher conveys the participants’ views of their attitude to collaboration.

4.5.1 Role of Collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective

The participants of the study gave similar opinions in relation to the role and importance of collaboration with peer teachers and school management. This predominantly conveyed how guidance counsellors must be open and willing to participate in collaboration and in many ways
expressed that collaborating is a fundamental part of their work. However, their ability to collaborate is dependent on other factors, such as facilitation by management.

Laura: “I think collaboration is a very important part of a Guidance Counsellor’s work... within the DEIS school, you would be linking in with different agencies, different supports, colleagues; and to be able to do that on a daily basis, you have to have a good rapport with peers”. “I think a lot of that can play a part in relation to the personality of the Guidance Counsellor”.

Carla: “I think collaboration is certainly... pivotal in the role... especially in the current situation [reference to being only guidance counsellor]... so collaboration is essential... on a number of fronts... working with school personnel, from class teachers to management, to year heads, to tutors and so on.

Chloe: “I would feel collaboration is very important but I’m not getting access... the care team meetings to collaborate with others... massive disadvantage”.

Trish: “I fell that collaboration is an integral part of my work. It’s hugely important. The students that I meet on a daily basis have a variety of needs and I think for those needs to be addressed, for students to develop in a holistic manner, we need to take a collaborative approach”.

Tom: “You can’t do your job then, if you can’t get access to your students... the only way to get access to your students is through collaboration with staff... you need the support of the staff in everything you do”.

The two male participants reiterated the importance of collaboration, referring to specific examples of guidance activities that demand collaboration from school management and peer teachers but also adopting a collaborative approach with the other guidance counsellor(s), chaplain, care team and home-school liaison person where applicable.

4.5.2 How Guidance Counsellors can increase Collaboration

The researcher found that there were several factors that Guidance Counsellors identified in relation to increasing collaboration with school management and peer teachers. Some stated that limited time, particularly those who operate solely in the guidance department, inhibited
their ability to increase collaboration. Others considered collaboration wholly necessary in achieving the goals of guidance and identified ways in which they aimed to achieve increased collaboration. Many participants in this study suggested that promoting the role of guidance amongst school personnel could help increase collaboration.

Laura: “I hope to implement a survey with my peers... I would like to give my peers and colleagues a voice in relation to the guidance role... what can I do to make it better”.

Chloe: “I think a lot of goodwill is gone from [staff], you know these Croke Park hours and stuff like that, so, it is hard to get people to meet at lunchtime; or you know, to take time off their own time. I honestly don’t know [how to increase collaboration]”.

Trish: “I could spend every lunchtime locked away in an office... So, I think a guidance counsellor needs to be careful to work on that collaborative approach... I think communication is essential... I feel it’s a team effort”... “I think communicating through staff meetings, through emails, through meeting, I think that in itself does increase collaboration with others”.

Tom: “There needs to be a shared understanding of what’s happening within the guidance department... staff are clear on the role of guidance, there is a placed value on guidance counselling within the school. Then, you will get collaboration... when you get support, you then therefore get collaboration.

Carla: “I do think a certain amount of self-promotion is necessary”.

The narratives suggest the importance of good communication skills and the ability to self-promote the role of guidance as a required attributes when operating as a guidance counsellor.

4.5.3 Limitations of Collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s Perspective

Most of the participants identified areas of guidance that could not be achieved through a collaborative whole-school approach, with the main focus being on the nature of personal counselling and the boundaries of confidentiality. Time limitations were also named as a factor
that inhibits collaboration. Participants also alluded to how the confidential nature of personal counselling within guidance could lead to professional isolation, burnout and empathy fatigue.

Laura:
“Collaboration is limited in relation to confidentiality and... personal counselling... our ethical guidelines and code of conduct, it’s not information that you discuss other people, so it is limited, especially when you are working in a department on your own.

Darren:
“Is there anything that inhibits collaboration? I suppose confidentiality... You can’t go and mention specific people that are going through specific personal, social, educational... issues”.

Trish:
“When again, you come to personal issues, and of a confidential nature, there are certain cases that can’t be discussed and that can’t be shared out, unless on a needs basis, with the DLP... it’s not possible to always collaborate with the entire teaching staff”.

Chloe:
“From my experience, it would be time wise... I think... it goes back to what they value, do they see value in guidance, are they going to give you the time to collaborate with other groups?”

Guidance Counsellors expressed how limited time to engage in collaboration was a key limitation.

Laura:
“It [collaboration] is limited when you are... the only person in the department”... “Not having enough hours in the day, administration, things maybe aren’t planned as effectively as they’d like to be”...

Carla:
“Time management can be difficult and sometimes maybe it takes longer to try and collaborate to do something rather than, maybe just go ahead and do it yourself”.

One guidance counsellor did not consider confidentiality to be a limitation, suggesting that even in personal/social counselling issues, there is a collaborative approach.

Tom:
“Yes absolutely. And that’s evident through the referral process and the referrals that we... receive”

In discussion of the limitations of collaboration, this led to a narrative of the issue of professional isolation, empathy fatigue and burnout.
Tom: “Burnout first of all... I think it depends on the make-up of the individual... I was talking about the limits of the guidance counsellors... if you are aware of what you can do and what your limits are and what your role is, then that will lessen the possibility of burnout”

Trish: “There is a tendency to keep going, because you’re the... take sole responsibility for planning your timetable, planning your week, planning your meetings, all of that. So, it could easily lead to professional isolation... I’m very careful not to allow it... I ask for help when I need it”.

Carla: “Burnout can absolutely be a feature of this role... trying to prove that you can do everything and then maybe taking on more than you potentially should have, can absolutely lead to burnout...and there is... the empathy side of it... day in day out with that... can be quite difficult”.

Darren: “Burnout is a potential. You could have people knocking on your door all the time. You need to find, kind of space for yourself to catch up on notes, or just give yourself a few minutes because it can be constant”.

Chloe: “I’m only fresh into it...I’ve very little burnout at the moment... do I see myself doing it for the rest of my days... no, absolutely not”.

Two guidance counsellors commented on how engagement with pastoral care team helps to reduce the risk of professional isolation and other guidance counsellors mentioned the importance of self-care, engaging with supervision and having personal hobbies that combat stress.

Trish: “It highlights to me more and more the importance of having something outside work that I enjoy; for me it’s exercise...because I mean, the personal counselling side of work can be draining”.

Carla: “Like for me, I suppose, it would be something like running or jogging or walking, that you know, you take that time, hopefully most days after school to do something that’s removed”.

Laura: “Especially when you work in isolation... I find personally, it’s [IGC supervision], it’s a real safety net, it’s a comfort, knowing that you can check in, but... it’s very sporadic when those are arranged”.
The researcher found through the participants’ narratives, that there are limitations in relation to collaboration in guidance counselling and therefore, there are consequences for guidance counsellors if they do not engage in self-care and supervision. Confidentiality and time constraints stood out as the major causes of limiting collaboration.

4.5.4 How the distribution of resources affect Collaboration

Aside from a unanimous view from each participant of this research that the need for increased hours and the reinstatement of the ex-quota allocation would greatly benefit guidance counselling and increase the opportunity for collaboration, the researcher found that there is a vast different in the distribution of resources between voluntary secondary schools and DEIS schools, which impacted on individual guidance services and their ability to engage in collaboration.

In the DEIS schools, guidance counsellors have the opportunity to engage with supports such as Home School Liaison person, Behavioural Support and a Chaplin. In two of the DEIS schools, there was also more than one guidance counsellors. In comparison to this, none of the guidance counsellors in voluntary secondary schools, with larger numbers, had access to the named supports above. The guidance counsellors expressed the need for these supports in their schools and the unfairness of the uneven distribution of resources.

Carla: “I know that DEIS school allocations, it’s almost twice as much as a normal secondary school... I know DEIS schools probably have more disadvantaged [students], but I think when you’re dealing with numbers like 800, like 22 hours a week doesn’t cover it”.

Trish: “I look, I have to say with envy, at schools that are fortunate enough to have somebody to take the responsibility for home-school liaison role... to take responsibility for behavioural support... when I see a school Chaplin”... “I just feel the biggest change that needs to take place is that we have an equal distribution of supports across all schools... I feel it’s a very unfair system... that I will go to work each and every day, and take responsibility for all of this”

These narratives raise the argument of whether there is an equal opportunity for collaboration in schools where there are inadequate resources available to guidance counsellors.
4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the perceptions of six guidance counsellors about their experience of collaboration and the factors that influence collaboration between school management and peer teachers in achieving a whole-school approach to guidance. The findings highlighted three themes and a variety of subthemes that have informed the researcher of guidance counsellors’ perception of collaboration; the influence of school management’s value of guidance, as well as peer teachers’ value of guidance and the implications this has on guidance counsellors in attaining a collaborative, whole-school approach to guidance. It is clear that guidance counsellors support collaborative work and regard it as a crucial component in the successful operation of a guidance service. Participants also identified key areas of collaboration in their work. The findings also highlight the challenges facing guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector; the need for changes in the allocation of hours, the increased distribution of resources and educating the school community about the role of guidance counsellor and roles in the WSA to guidance were identified as critical elements that need to be addressed. It is evident that if these issues are not dealt with, the delivery of guidance may be insufficient in meeting the needs of students and a genuine ability and commitment to collaborate in a WSA to guidance may not be feasible. Moreover, the findings highlight the possible dangers of inadequate support and resources on guidance counsellors’ wellbeing and indeed the future of the profession.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This study aimed to explore how guidance counsellors perceive collaboration in their work with school management and peer teachers. The purpose of this study was to discover what implications collaboration has on achieving a holistic, WSA to guidance counselling and to what extent guidance counsellors feel a WSA is applicable in the delivery of guidance
counselling in post-primary schools. This discussion chapter will focus on the primary research question that has underpinned the study:

*From a guidance counsellor’s perspective, what is the reality of collaborative work with peer teachers and school management in achieving a whole school approach to guidance in the post primary sector?*

It will also address the secondary research questions that the researcher has outlined:

1. What are guidance counsellors’ roles in relation to professional collaboration with peer teachers and school management in the post primary sector?
2. What type of collaborative work do they engage in?
3. Is collaborative work contrived or genuine in achieving the whole school approach and what are the implications of these findings for the guidance counsellor?
4. Do Guidance Counsellors feel supported in their work or is professional isolation, empathy fatigue and burnout a reality in the profession?

The findings chapter highlighted three overarching themes that have influenced to what extent guidance counsellors engage in a collaborative approach to guidance counselling with school management and peer teachers. Through the interview process, the researcher gained insight into the perceptions of guidance counsellors in relation to achieving collaboration in their work and also how the ability to engage in collaboration in greatly influenced by school management’s attitude towards guidance. This, in turn influences how peer teachers value guidance and engage in a collaborative, whole-school approach to guidance counselling. The findings suggest that guidance counsellors value a collaborative, whole-school approach to guidance counselling, but participants also identified key influences and barriers in achieving such an approach. This chapter will discuss the key findings in relation to the current literature available in this area. Participants of the study highlighted areas where a collaborative approach has been and continues to be adopted in the delivery of a guidance service. However, they also highlighted areas where a collaborative approach is not possible due to time constraints and the nature of confidentiality with personal counselling, while others suggested the extent to which management’s placed value on guidance greatly influences whether a collaborative approach is executed in the delivery of the guidance service. The three underpinning themes that exposed such narratives were:

1. School Management’s value of Guidance Counselling
2. Peer Teachers’ value of Guidance Counselling

Each overarching theme had four subthemes that enhanced the researcher’s understanding of the factors influencing collaboration.

5.1 School Management’s value on Guidance Counselling

All participants of this research project identified school management’s attitude and value on guidance counselling as a major influence on whether or not a collaborative approach to guidance counselling was implemented in their post-primary setting. The subthemes that informed this overarching theme were:

1. Allocation of hours.
2. The influences that management’s perception of Guidance Counselling has on teachers.

5.1.1 Allocation of hours

Where school management were identified as having great value on guidance counselling, it was reflected in the allocation of hours given to guidance on the school timetable. This is as a result of 2012 budget cuts (DES, 2012), whereby the loss of ex-quota allocation to guidance meant that school management were then given autonomy of how many hours would be allocated to guidance in their respective schools. Hayes and Morgan (2011) and the IGC (2016) noted how this drastically affected the delivery of guidance, with a particular reduction in one-to-one guidance. All participants of the study reiterated the point of view that the 2012 budget cuts greatly affected how guidance was delivered. Four of the six participants stated that they would like to see the re-introduction of ex-quota allocation of hours, rather than giving school management autonomy in relation to allocation of hours. Where school management has not valued guidance, or perhaps placed more value on other subjects, guidance counselling often suffered and was not given adequate time on the timetable. Guidance counsellors sometimes had to juggle classroom teaching in conjunction to the delivery of the guidance service, resulting in increased workloads. This opinion is also conveyed in recent studies, with one guidance counsellor stating that as a result of budget cuts, her workload had “doubled” because she was trying to operate a guidance service in conjunction with subject teaching (Leahy et al, 2016, p7).
This research study also highlighted that the reduction of hours in guidance was not conducive to increasing collaboration. However, two participants acknowledged that because school management valued guidance counselling, their hours were protected after budget 2012 cuts. Tom also stated how guidance counselling had actually increased in his school, with the employment of two other guidance counsellors. This conveys how school management’s value on guidance directly affects how much time is allocated to the delivery of guidance in the post primary setting.

5.1.2 School Managements’ perception of Guidance Counselling

Participants of the study also stated that school management’s perception of guidance counselling directly influences peer teachers’ attitudes towards guidance and engagement with guidance in achieving a whole-school approach. Darren and Trish acknowledged that if guidance is supported by management, it generally is valued and supported by peer teachers. Both participants stated that peer teachers value and engage with guidance initiatives because it is valued by management.

In New South Wales in Australia, it is stated that the role of guidance counsellor is to “complement and support the work of teachers” (NSW, DOE, 2018, p3), suggesting that guidance counsellors and teachers should engage in a collaborative approach in supporting the holistic needs of students. Best (1990) describes teachers as “loco parentis”, meaning they have a duty of care to their students, while Gordan (2010, p50), states that a holistic vision of education is based on the concept of assisting the development of “the whole-person”. Because students engage with teachers continuously, a “synergistic cooperation” is required to support the needs of students (Hidayat, 2016, p7). Hidayat also states that the idea of the holistic vision of guidance counselling is interdisciplinary, integrated and collaborative in nature because the human being or student is going through a process of human development and must interact with their environment, and teachers form part of that environment. This is also echoed in Barnes’ social constructivist model, whereby students gain knowledge construction through activities and interactions with professionals, such as teachers (Barnes et al, 2011). Hence, teachers have become directly implicated in the delivery of a whole school approach to guidance, which was affirmed by the 2012 Minister of Education Ruairi Quinn in response to budget cuts in guidance. However, Chloe stated that this collaborative approach is not occurring because in schools where management do not value guidance, teachers do not see a
value in engaging with it and do not see it as part of their responsibility. This corresponds with Bryan and McCoy’s analysis (2007) that school climate and role perceptions affect “involvement in collaborative relationships” (cited in Gibbins et al, 2010, p5). And so, this highlights how management’s view and attitude towards guidance is in many ways imitated by teachers.

5.1.3 Management’s Perception and Expectation of Guidance Counsellors’ roles

Similarly, management’s perception and expectations of Guidance counsellor’s roles influenced how the guidance service is delivered. Laura stated that her perception of her role is in some ways conflicting with that of management’s view of guidance. She stated that management considered her role to be more vocational and educational in nature, with an expectation to outsource personal counselling. She found that this was, at times, restricting her ability to deliver a guidance service that was in alignment with her understanding of her role. Hayes and Morgan’s research (2011, p8) on the practice of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector in Ireland found that there “is not a shared understanding of what the counselling aspect of the role involves” among the key stakeholders, which includes principals and deputy principals. International literature also supports this view, with a Malaysian guidance counsellor stating that “the teachers and school administrator [management] don’t have a clear picture of what counselling is about” (Low et al, 2013, p193). Chloe, another participant, also stated that while she has vocational guidance classes, there is no emphasis on personal counselling in her role and she has not been allotted time to facilitate one-to-one personal counselling. She stated that school management did not preempt the need for personal counselling arising from topics covered during classroom guidance, hence did not include any time for one-to-one personal counselling on her timetable, which again was in conflict with her stance of what guidance counselling involves. Evan and Rallings (2013) assert that face-to-face services are necessary for young people to make career decisions and deal with personal issues, hence classroom guidance does not suffice exclusively in the delivery of guidance.

Furthermore, Laura also expressed her difficulty with being timetabled for LCVP, which, in her opinion, is not part of the guidance counsellor’s role. She expressed a preference to be timetabled for guidance classes, as she felt it would be more beneficial in the delivery of guidance. Carla also expressed concern that her management seemed to value one-to-one guidance, hence she was not timetabled for guidance classes at all. As a result, she stated that
personal/social counselling consumed the majority of her time and vocational/career guidance was sometimes side-lined and not given the time it requires to meet the needs of her students. On the other hand, Darren’s narrative exposed how management have separated vocational guidance from personal/social guidance and that he has been timetabled for mostly personal counselling, while the other guidance counsellor dealt predominantly with vocational/educational guidance. However, he did not express dissatisfaction with this as he felt that management were mindful of his strengths and preference for personal counselling.

It is clear from the narratives of participants that when management’s attitude and perception of what the role of the guidance counsellor is, is in alignment with that of the guidance counsellor, it allows the guidance counsellor to address the needs of students in their particular setting. Consequently, the researcher acknowledges that this is an example of genuine collaboration between guidance counsellor and management. Conversely, when management’s perception of guidance differs from the guidance counsellor, it puts limitations on what can be achieved by guidance counsellors. Hence, this suggests that the statue of collaboration between guidance counsellors and school management can be both limiting and enhancing.

5.1.4 Facilitation of Collaboration in relation to Whole-School Guidance

Appley and Windsor (1977) state that having a clear concept of what is trying to be achieved and mutual care and commitment is necessary for professional collaboration. The DES (2005a, p4) state that the guidance programme “should draw on the expertise of the guidance counsellor/s… as well as all relevant management and staff”. However, it has become clear, through the narratives of participants, that for collaboration to be achieved, school management must enable the facilitation of it, particularly when trying to accomplish whole-school initiatives. The researcher found mixed responses in relation to this.

Chloe stated that collaboration is limited between other relevant departments such as SEN, SPHE and LCVP because school management do not facilitate meetings between these departments and the subjects clash on the timetable. Carla stated that she firstly must consult with management and gain their support when she wants to carry out whole-school initiatives and if management are willing to support it, they then facilitate collaboration with teachers and the whole school community. However, the researcher noted that this narrative suggested that if school management do not support the initiative, it is therefore not possible for the guidance counsellor to implement it. Fullen and Hargreaves (1992) highlight that effective collaboration
can only exist if the school culture values it and consider it a norm. This relates to previous findings outlined, whereby the value system in relation to guidance and collaboration stems from management’s placed significance on it and greatly influences peer teachers’ engagement with the WSA to guidance.

The ASCA (2009) examined school counsellor and principal relationships. They found that principals wanted quality of communication, while counsellors valued frequent communication. Trish acknowledged frequent collaboration and communication with management as a norm in her weekly timetable, with two pastoral care meetings, and being able to call on management outside of timetabled meetings for consultation if necessary. She stated that management supported whole school guidance initiatives, for example, a whole school study skills programme, which is implemented by the guidance counsellor in conjunction with peer teachers. She also indicated that having a slot at staff meetings to address the staff on guidance related issues and proposed initiatives, conveying examples of how management facilitate the WSA to guidance. Similarly, Tom acknowledged the benefit of having a care team, a pastoral care structure facilitated and supported by school management, which allows him to deal with personal counselling referrals in a collaborative way. This practice complements findings by the ACA (1993) that “Inter-association and/or interagency dialogue and collaboration” are “necessary components of an effective comprehensive developmental counselling and guidance program” (Allen, 1994, p1). This collaborative approach is supported by Fullen and Hargreaves’ (1992, p17) claim that “we must experiment and discover better ways of working together that mobilize the power of the group”.

The researcher has found through the discourse of participants that school management’s role in facilitation of WSA to guidance is pivotal in achieving collaboration and where not facilitated, collaboration is reduced, thus affecting the guidance counsellor’s ability to sustain a WSA to guidance counselling. This emphasises the problem of a lack of consistency in the implementation of a WSA to guidance counselling in the post-primary sector.

5.2 Peer Teachers’ value of Guidance Counselling

The narratives of participants also emphasised the influence of peer teachers and their value of guidance counselling in achieving a collaborative approach to guidance. The four subthemes that underpinned this themes are as follows:
1. Teachers’ understanding of the Role of Guidance Counsellor.
2. Awareness of Teachers roles in WSA to Guidance.
3. Areas of Collaboration between Teachers and Guidance Counsellors
4. The factors that influence teachers’ engagement with Whole School Guidance.

5.2.1 Teachers’ understanding of the Role of Guidance Counsellor

The NGF stated that guidance counselling is to assist people to “manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices… and contribute to the development of a better society” (NGF, 2007, p13). The Government of Ireland (1992) identified three areas under which the guidance counsellor must operate: the educational, vocational and career choices of young people. In addition to this, the guidance counsellor is also responsible for the “appraisal and assessment and counselling for those experiencing learning and personal difficulties” (cited in Sheil & Lewis, 1993, p8) The researcher became aware that teachers’ understanding of the role of guidance counsellor was an important aspect of whether they engaged collaboratively with the guidance counsellor and supported the guidance service. Chloe stated that there is a lack of awareness amongst teaching staff in her school about the role of the guidance counsellor, while Trish acknowledged that some teachers see their boundaries very much within the classroom setting. However, she also recognised how teaching staff were very aware of the pastoral needs of students and made efforts to support and guide students with personal difficulties and career decision making. According to Hearne (2012, p6), “the constant need to educate staff of the guidance function is a repetitive feature” of the work of the guidance counsellor. The lack of “shared understanding” among “key stakeholders” (Hayes and Morgan, 2011, p8) about the role of the guidance counsellor, which includes teachers, suggests that peer teachers cannot fully engage with the guidance service or the WSA if they are uncertain about what it aims to achieve. Hence, educating staff is a central part of the guidance counsellor’s work. Conversely, Darren stated that his peer teachers are very aware of the role of guidance counsellor and engaged continuously with the guidance department in an endeavour to support students, which conveys the positive effects of self-promotion of role.

The participant’s narratives emphasise the value of guidance counsellors promoting their role amongst peer teachers as a way of increasing a collaborative approach and perhaps developing a more effective WSA to guidance. However, it is important to note, that the onus is on the guidance counsellor to engage with staff about the role of the guidance counsellor and their
service and this will largely depend on the guidance counsellor’s communication skills, self-efficacy and confidence. It suggests that positive personal attributes are of vital importance to the role of guidance counsellor. Furthermore, it is dependent on teachers’ attitudes towards guidance and school management’s value and awareness of the role and whether the guidance counsellor has the freedom and support to engage with peer teachers collaboratively.

5.2.2 Awareness of Teacher Roles in the Whole School Approach to Guidance

The WSA approach to guidance has been deemed by policy makers “as a model of good practice in the delivery of guidance and counselling in the post-primary sector” (DES, 2005a, 2009, 2012). A WSA to guidance aims to develop a collaborative approach by the school community to plan and deliver a guidance plan that suitably meets the needs of students (Hearne & Galvin, 2015). Guidance counsellors, school management, teachers and resource staff have the most responsibility in relation to guidance planning and delivery (DES 2009, 2012). The participants provided a varied response in relation to teachers being aware of their role in the WSA to guidance. Carla stated that some teachers see it guidance as part of their role, engaging with students on subject choice and potential career paths that can be pursued with particular subjects. Tom suggested that the vast majority of teachers are unaware of what the whole school guidance plan contains but are engaging with WSA to guidance often without realising it. He suggested that it is important for the guidance counsellor to highlight to staff where they are already achieving the goals of WSA to guidance, without peer teachers feeling it is an “extra burden”. The NCCA (2017) created a pie chart explicating the concept of WSA to guidance. It effectively outlines the variety of activities that form the crux of the WSA to guidance and implicates the guidance counsellor, school management and teaching staff in the delivery of these activities. Tom outlined how he has promoted the “Whole School Guidance” wheel (NCCA, 2017, p14) as a means of educating peer teachers about how they are already engaging with the WSA and how they can continue to participate in a WSA to guidance. Conversely, Chloe was adamant that teachers are unaware of the guidance plan in her school and do not engage with it at all and Laura acknowledged that teachers do engage with it but questioned their consistency, suggesting that perhaps in some schools, teachers do not work in a genuinely collaborative way with the WSA to guidance. This echoes Fullen and Hargreaves’ concept of balkanisation (1992), whereby teachers only associate planning with their own subject department, which in turn is detrimental to whole-school planning initiatives. Similarly,
it may also involve comfortable collaboration, which Fullen and Hargreaves (1992) define as collaboration to achieve short-term goals and involves little depth or reflective practice.

The concept of WSA to guidance formed part of public discourse in relation to the delivery of guidance counselling in 2012, after guidance counselling lost its ex-quota allocation. The DES (2012b) circular stated that a WSA to guidance was “established policy”, in which the roles of key stakeholders, guidance counsellor, school management and teaching staff were to be clearly defined in the guidance plan. However, from the participants’ narratives, it is clear that teachers lack awareness about the contents of the guidance plan and indeed their roles in delivering it. This poses the question about how effective the WSA to guidance actually is, if teaching staff, who are supposed to play a fundamental part in its delivery, are oblivious to their role in it.

5.2.3 Areas of Collaboration between Teachers and Guidance Counsellors

The participants of the study identified areas of collaboration with peer teachers that support them in their delivery of guidance. It is clear to the researcher that since budget cuts to guidance in 2012, guidance counsellors have had to increase and sometimes lean on particular subject departments to meet the guidance needs of students. In response to the re-allocation of hours post-budget 2012, the DES encouraged the use of ICT in the delivery of guidance as a practical way of delivering information, requiring less one-to-one guidance (DES, 2012). However, in order to implement this, guidance counsellors were forced to increase collaboration with peer teachers, in order to fulfil the vocational and educational elements of guidance counselling. McGuiness (1989) suggested infusing guidance topics into academic curriculum. Similarly, Watkins (1994) proposes a “whole curriculum” approach in dealing with social and personal needs. This humanistic approach aims to deal with human problems through a cross-curricular based method.

Laura, Carla, Chloe and Darren identified Wellbeing, SPHE and Religious teachers as those they collaborate with most in the delivery of guidance. This corresponds with the DES (2012) proposal that “some of the curriculum elements of the planned guidance programme be delivered through other teachers as SPHE staff” (p5, cited in Hearne & Galvin, 2016). Trish stated that educational and vocational guidance, in particular subject choice and study skills, are areas that apply to all subject departments. Carla stated that she often had to borrow religion classes because she does not have any guidance classes with 6th years. This is particularly
necessary at pivotal points throughout the year, such as CAO application time. On the other hand, Tom suggested that he did not need to collaborate as much with peer teachers unless they were referring a student for personal counselling because he is timetabled for several guidance classes and can deliver the curriculum himself.

Personal counselling referrals were a common area for most participants that required collaboration with teaching staff, because teaching staff are on the frontline with students and can identify students in need of personal counselling. According to a Malaysian guidance counsellor, “teachers have the advantage of identifying students’ problems since they have to manage students’ inappropriate behaviours in the classroom” (Low et al, 2013, p194). The participants agreed that this referral system forms the most critical area of collaboration with teachers in their work, particularly those who do not have classroom contact with students. However, the researcher did note that guidance counsellors’ perceptions of collaboration differed. Some participants considered gaining access to students for personal counselling or delivering information through borrowed time, effective collaboration, while other participants engaged with teaching staff in all aspects of the guidance programme. This highlights how the guidance counsellor’s subjective view of collaboration can influence the level of collaboration that is achieved.

5.2.4 The factors that influence teachers’ engagement with Whole-School Guidance

The findings suggest that teachers’ engagement with whole school guidance largely depended on their value of guidance counselling, their previous experience of guidance and as previously discussed, the influence management have on teachers valuing guidance counselling. Time constraints also featured as a factor that inhibited teachers engaging with a WSA to guidance.

Carla expressed how the lack of understanding about the role of guidance can create a negative perception from some staff members, because the guidance counsellor operates mostly from an office space and people are unsure what she actually does, while other teachers do not see it as their responsibility. This corresponds with an insight expressed by Barnes et al (2011, p7) that teachers’ lack of awareness and confusion about their responsibility in relation to guidance could regard guidance as “everybody and nobody’s responsibility”. Chloe stated that teachers in her school would have considered guidance counselling as a “handy way out”, while Tom suggested that teachers may have formed the view that guidance is “semi-cushy”. On the other hand, if teachers have developed a positive view of guidance and understand its purpose,
participants expressed that teachers involve themselves in whole school guidance initiatives. Therefore, it is evident that teachers’ opinion of guidance, awareness, or lack thereof about their role in guidance, as well as time constraints are the main factors that influence teachers’ engagement with whole-school guidance. It is also imperative to acknowledge that budget cuts to guidance caused irreparable damage to the reputation of guidance counselling as a profession because it may have been viewed as an area of education that was dispensable or superfluous. According to a participant in Leahy et al (2016, p8), reduced guidance hours degraded and diluted “the work and role of the guidance counsellor”.

5.3 Guidance Counsellors’ attitudes towards Collaboration.

There are many facets that influence collaboration as discussed by the researcher in this chapter, however, guidance counsellors are at the heart of this dissertation, hence their attitudes to collaboration form the kernel of whether collaboration can or cannot be achieved. Therefore, it is essential that the researcher examine the attitudes and perceptions of guidance counsellors about collaboration to inform this discourse. The four subthemes that supported the overarching theme were:

1. Role of Collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective.
2. How Guidance Counsellors can increase Collaboration.
3. Limitations of collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective.

5.3.1 Role of Collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective

The participants expressed a positive response to collaboration and stated that they regard collaboration as an essential part of their work. Laura, Carla, Trish and Tom stated that it would not be possible for a guidance counsellor to operate solely, and that collaboration with school management and peer teachers in supporting students is a primary element of guidance counselling. This hypothesis is closely linked with Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System’s theory (1979), which suggests that a person’s interaction with their environment has an influence on their personal, social and vocational development. Hence, guidance counsellors are aware that teachers and school management are influential stakeholders in a young person’s development, therefore “cooperation, communication and system support” is indispensable in supporting the needs of students (Hidayat, 2016, p7). Similarly, Savickas (2011b) recognises the influence role models can have on a person’s career choices and because students most of
their time in education with teachers, it is imperative to take into consideration the potential influence teachers have on students, hence close collaboration with the guidance counsellor is warranted. However, while Chloe expressed a desire to collaborate more with staff, she stated that she is not being facilitated by management to achieve a collaborative approach. This conveys that despite aspiring to collaborate, there are other factors that determine whether it is achievable. Griffin, Jones and Kilgore (2006) found that regular communication, positive collegiality, and school environment affected school collaboration, all of which were alluded to by participants of this study when discussing their perception of collaboration.

Three participants, Carla, Laura and Trish operate on a sole basis in their department; they acknowledged the importance of developing a good rapport with management and peer teacher as a way of encouraging collaboration and seeking support in the delivery of guidance. Tom and Darren declared that they work collaboratively in all aspects of the guidance programme with the other guidance counsellors in their department but expressed recognition that they also must collaborate with management and teaching staff. The Teaching Council states definitively in the Code of Conduct for Teachers (2016) that teachers should:

work with teaching colleagues and student teachers in the interest of sharing, developing and supporting good practice and maintaining the highest possible standards of educational experiences for pupils/students (The Teaching Council, 2016, p8).

This conveys an expectation of teaching staff, including guidance counsellors to work “in a manner that is “professional, collaborative and supportive” (Ibid, 2016, p7). Ideally, school management, teaching staff and guidance counsellors should share “mutual aspirations” in the delivery of guidance, but it is also obvious that collaboration is largely dependent on good communication skills, positive collegiality and school environment. Thus, while guidance counsellors may have positive regard for collaboration, its success may depend on their communication skills, ability to develop positive relationships and the atmosphere in which they operate.

5.3.2 How Guidance Counsellors can increase Collaboration.

The participants of the study had diverse opinions regarding their ability to increase collaboration. Guidance counsellors that operate solely in the guidance department indicated not having enough time to increase collaboration. However, some participants also discussed
ways in which they aspire to increase collaboration. The researcher noted that the majority of participants referred to promoting the role of guidance either through a survey, but more predominantly through communication at staff meetings, informing staff of the role of guidance, how teachers can engage with the WSA to guidance and seeking feedback from staff members about how they, collectively, can improve the delivery of the guidance service as a means of increasing collaboration. This is compatible with Hearne’s findings (2012), that the perpetual need to educate staff on the role of guidance counsellor is a recurring characteristic of the work. Appley and Windor (1977) suggest that an important facet of working collaboratively is commitment but that it must be a matter of choice. Carla and Chloe suggested that they cannot commit to increase collaboration because they do not have enough time to do so. Carla also stated that collaboration is time consuming and she finds it easier to sometimes do the work herself. Furthermore, in relation to the personal/social counselling aspect of guidance, participants stated that increasing collaboration amongst staff, beyond the referral process, is not always possible because of the limitations of confidentiality.

Therefore, to increase collaboration, guidance counsellors need more time to do so. Despite a slight recovery of allocation of hours to guidance, it is abundantly clear that the full reinstatement of ex-quota allocation is needed to increase collaboration between guidance counsellors and staff.

5.3.3 Limitations of collaboration from the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective.

The participants identified several limitations of collaboration in their role, with a particular focus on the nature of the personal/social counselling aspect of their work. The boundaries of confidentiality in practice was identified as the main limitation. This also sparked a discussion about the possibility of burnout, empathy fatigue and professional isolation. As alluded to earlier in this chapter, time limitations were also deemed as a limiting factor to achieve collaboration.

Laura, Darren, Trish and Chloe acknowledged that the role of guidance counsellor is clearly defined in the IGC’s Code of Conduct (IGC, 2016), whereby guidance counsellors must adhere to protecting the confidentiality of their clients in the most veracious manner. This has implications for achieving a WSA to guidance, and suggests that the personal/social counselling needs of students cannot be fully addressed adopting a WSA; the personal/social counselling aspect of the work cannot be equally shared with the entire teaching or school
management in a collaborative manner. The NCGE (2011, p7) study stated that 35% of participants felt that the counselling aspect of their work was “not formally recognised as part of the Whole School process”. Guidance counsellors are specifically trained in personal counselling, hence teachers cannot fulfil this role. However, some participants recognised that the personal counselling referral process is a way in which collaboration is evident in this area of expertise.

Time limitations were also a common feature of participants’ dialogue in relation to the limitations of collaboration. This is supported by literature in response to 2012 budget cuts to guidance, whereby a respondent to a study conducted by Leahy et al (2016, p7) stated that “60% of [her] hours were taken and [she] had to go back into the classroom”. She also stated that she was “completing all the work that used to be shared between guidance counsellors within the same timeframe” (Ibid, 2016, p7). The ASTI acknowledged that reduced hours for guidance, and specifically one-to-one counselling could have “far reaching consequences for student welfare” (ASTI, 2013, p27), views that were supported by the IGC (2012, 2014), JMB (2012) and the NCGE (2013).

The limitations of confidentiality as well as time limitations opened discourse about the possibility of burnout, empathy fatigue and professional isolation. The participants stated that professional isolation could potentially become a reality of the work of a guidance counsellor, particularly those who work solely in the guidance department. The general consensus of participants in relation to this was that guidance counsellors must be conscious of their practice and continuously engage with supervision, student pastoral care teams, peer teachers and management to avoid isolation. Similarly, in relation to burnout and empathy fatigue, all participants acknowledged that these could become features of guidance counselling but being mindful of one’s limitations can decrease the chances of burnout and empathy fatigue. Skovolt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) claim the perils of “high-touch work” involve the inability to say no, dealing with a mass of stress emotions, the confidential nature of the work, constantly empathising, not being able to see tangible or measurable success and regulatory control from external entities (cited in Hearne, 2012, p2). This highlights the importance of guidance counsellors engaging in self-care practices and attending organised supervision.

It is evident that there are several factors that create limitation for collaboration from the Guidance counsellor’s perspective; confidentiality and time, which can lead to professional isolation, burnout and empathy fatigue. This poses the question of whether guidance
counsellors are being sufficiently supported in their role by the DES and whether change in policy is required.

5.3.4 How the Distribution of Resources affect Collaboration

In Ireland, DEIS schools are afforded increased resources than voluntary secondary schools. Three of the participants represented schools with DEIS status, while the other three participants came from voluntary secondary school settings. It became evident to the researcher that the experience and opportunity for collaboration differed between guidance counsellors in DEIS schools and those in voluntary secondary schools. In the voluntary post primary schools, participants did not have access to external supports such as a Home School Liaison officer, behavioural support or a Chaplain, despite having larger numbers to serve. In two of the DEIS schools, there were more than one guidance counsellor and they had access to the named external supports. There has been little research carried out about how the unequal distribution of resources in post-primary schools in Ireland affect collaboration, but studies from the UK suggest that cuts to guidance have decreased the quality of guidance services (Ofsted, 2013). This poses the question of whether some schools, particularly those with less resources and external supports, can provide a guidance service as effectively as those with the named supports. It also raises the question of whether inequality is a facet of our education system. Overall, however, it highlights that the ability to engage in meaningful collaboration is curbed by a lack of adequate resources.

5.4 Conclusion

It became more obvious from participants’ narratives that the area of collaboration has several dynamics. Throughout this chapter, the researcher has related these narratives to current literature and has found many areas where the participants’ views correspond with findings of previous research and literature. It also highlights the need for change in policy making in relation to WSA to guidance. The three themes that have underpinned the study findings suggest that school management and peer teachers’ value of collaboration influence to what extent collaboration can be achieved in responding to the WSA to guidance. It also examines how guidance counsellors’ attitudes towards collaboration has an impact on the delivery of guidance. The OECD (2004) and the European Union (2008) have reiterated the concept that
the role of guidance counselling is to assist people in becoming “effective managers” of their learning and career paths (DES, 2016a, p17). In addition to this, guidance counselling aims to support students “holistically in the academic, career, and personal/social domains” (Reiner et al, 2009, p324), suggesting that guidance should be delivered using a WSA.

Since budget 2012, cuts to the ex-quota allocation of hours for guidance have changed the face of guidance counselling in Ireland, requiring a deeper engagement with the WSA to guidance by the key stakeholders: school management, teaching staff and guidance counsellors. The findings of this research signify that increased hours are required in guidance to fulfil the vocational, educational and personal/social needs of young people in the post-primary sector. School management’s autonomy in this regards creates a lack of consistency of the functionality of guidance services in respective post-primary settings, which is largely influenced by their value on guidance counselling. Similarly, the findings suggest that management’s value, or lack thereof, impacts on the value teaching staff place on guidance. Despite the DES (2005, p4) stating that schools must “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance”, and the guidance programme should “draw on the expertise of the guidance counsellor… as well as all relevant management and staff”, school management’s expectations and inherent control can dominate what is available and attainable in the guidance service, and whose vision of guidance can sometimes be in conflict with that of the practitioner.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the key findings and conclusions in relation to the aims and objectives of this research study. The researcher will outline the main findings of this study and also consider the strengths and limitations of this study. Considerations and recommendations for future policy, practice and areas of potential for future research will also be delineated. Finally, the researcher will explore their reflexivity in terms of the research process.

6.1 Synopsis of Findings

The aim of this research project was to gain insight into how guidance counsellors perceive collaboration in their work with school management and peer teachers. The methodology undertaken in this study was an interpretivist qualitative approach, a methodology commonly used in research areas related to counselling and psychotherapy (McLeod, 2011). In particular, the researcher applied Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis approach (2006) as a means of analysing the data findings. This particular interpretivist paradigm was justified in this research because the researcher aimed to co-construct meaning through semi-structured interviews about how guidance counsellors perceive the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peer teachers. The purpose of this was to gain insight into what extent guidance counsellors engage in collaborative work with their colleagues in achieving a WSA to guidance counselling. According to Thomas, interpretivism is “interested in people and the way they interrelate – what they think and how they form ideas about the world” (Thomas,
2013, p108). Therefore this paradigm was employed to perceive guidance counsellors’ views and experiences of collaboration in their profession. It is endeavoured that this research will inform guidance counsellors about how best to implement a collaborative approach in achieving a WSA to guidance.

The findings highlighted that collaboration is a central component in the delivery of guidance counselling, particularly when trying to achieve the goals of the whole-school approach. Collaboration was most evident between school management and peer teachers in establishing whole-school initiatives such as study skills programmes, subject choice, wellbeing/mental health initiatives and through a personal counselling referral system. In many respects, the participants of the study acknowledged that the guidance service could not operate without collaboration amongst staff. However, it also signified that there are many influential factors pertaining to the effectiveness and coherency of collaboration in guidance. These factors include the influence of school management’s value of guidance counselling, peer teachers’ value on guidance and indeed the attitudes of guidance counsellors to the concept of collaboration. The autonomy given to school management in the allocation of hours was highlighted as a point of contention amongst the participants because it has directly affected guidance counsellors’ management of the guidance service and ability to achieve the aims of guidance counselling. All participants acknowledged that the full re-establishment of ex-quota hours and increased resources are needed to ensure an adequate delivery of guidance in the post-primary sector. It was clear from the findings that guidance counsellors perceive collaboration as a necessary and welcomed constituent of their work. However, not having adequate time to collaborate and not being facilitated by school management to collaborate were identified as barriers to collaborate. Furthermore, peer teachers’ lack of awareness about the role of guidance counsellor and their roles in the delivery of a WSA to guidance were also identified as barriers in achieving a collaborative approach. Additionally, some participants suggested that conflicting views between management and the guidance counsellor of what guidance counselling is and what the guidance service should achieve were also identified as a barriers in achieving cohesive and constructive collaboration.

The importance of promoting the role of guidance and creating awareness and conformity amongst staff about a WSA to guidance was emphasised as an area in constant need of attention in the work of a guidance counsellor. However, it must be noted that the experiences of guidance counsellors in relation to collaboration differed in their respective work settings due to the fluctuating allocation of hours (autonomous to school management) and varying values.
systems about guidance (particularly from school management and peer teachers), highlighting that the budget cuts to guidance (DES, 2012) has created a lack of uniformity, consistency and equality in the delivery of guidance in the post-primary schools that participated in this research. Moreover, participants also discussed the personal pitfalls of the declining provision for guidance counselling in the last number of years. The participants stated that professional isolation, burnout and empathy fatigue are realistic dangers within the guidance counselling profession in its current capacity. These dangers were particularly evident in the personal/social counselling aspect of participants’ work, as this area was identified by most participants as something that cannot be achieved through a WSA, because of the confines of confidentiality and specific training need to carry out this work. The importance of supervision, self-care practices and being afforded and facilitated by management to increase collaboration were classified as a means of overcoming or avoiding the pitfalls mentioned. The researcher identified the unequal distribution of resources amongst DEIS and Voluntary secondary schools, and its effect on the delivery of guidance counselling, as an area that requires further research in the Irish context. Overall, findings suggest that guidance counsellors have a positive perception of collaboration but changes in policy is needed in regards to guidance counselling in the post-primary sector to ensure just and equal “guidance for all” (NCCA, 2017, p14).

6.2 Strengths of Study

Research and publications has identified the effects of budget cuts to guidance in the post-primary sector since 2012 (ASTI 2013, Hearne et al 2016, IGC, 2013, JMB, 2012, Leahy et al 2016). However, the researcher identified a gap in current research in relation to how guidance counsellors perceive collaboration in their work with school management and peer teachers in achieving a WSA to guidance counselling. Therefore, the data findings from semi-structured interviews of guidance counsellors prove beneficial in informing the wider community of the nature of collaboration between guidance counsellors, school management and peer teachers in the delivery of guidance in the post-primary sector. Braun and Clarke’s thematic approach supported the analysis of the interpretivist paradigm chosen by the researcher. This approach offered the researcher flexibility and the “potential to offer an affluent and detailed, yet multifaceted version of data” from the participants’ interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p4). The six-stage model allowed the researcher to interpret the interviews of participants and code and identify themes/patterns that gave insight into guidance counsellors’ perceptions of
collaboration with school management and peer teachers in their work. Using this process, three overarching themes emerged and each overarching theme contained four subthemes. These themes and subthemes identified important facets that influence collaboration between guidance counsellors and their colleagues. It allowed the researcher to recognise areas of collaboration that guidance counsellors perceive as being effective and also areas in need of improvement. It is endeavoured that the findings of this research will inform policy and practice in the guidance service and particularly in relation to achieving a WSA to guidance counselling.

6.3 Limitations of Study

The main limitation of this study was that only six guidance counsellors from the post-primary sector in Ireland were interviewed. Hence, the findings of this research study highlight a small range of views to the study (Cohen et al, 2011). Therefore, it cannot be suggested that the findings of this research study represent the whole population of guidance counsellors in the profession but may be typical of the sector at this time (Ibid, 2011). However, a broader sample could have wielded substantial similarities or differences to the findings presented.

Another limitation of this study is that the researcher has been operating as a trainee guidance counsellor in the post-primary sector, and hence could have a biased view of collaboration between guidance counsellors and staff, based on their placement experience. In order to reduce bias, the researcher interviewed six guidance counsellors from other post-primary schools, with a variety of experience and some of whom worked in schools that differed in status and gender population from the researcher’s own work setting. The researcher was also mindful of maintaining a consistent approach, posing the same set questions to participants in each interview and presenting the data from the participants’ points of view, rather than the researchers, as is recommended by Geertz (1974) (cited in Cohen et al, 2011).

The research interviews were carried out on both male and female guidance counsellors from voluntary secondary schools and schools with DEIS status. However, there is no representation of guidance counsellors either from community schools or private post-primary schools, hence this conveys a limitation of the study. As participation in this research study was voluntary, the researcher was not offered access to voluntary participants from either community or private schools and therefore, the sample did not represent guidance counsellors from these work settings. Had there been voluntary participation from guidance counsellors working in these
settings, the results could have wielded similar or diverging results, hence the research is limited in its representation of the post-primary sector.

It must also be noted that this research has presented the subjective views of a small number of guidance counsellors currently working in the post-primary sector, achieved using an interpretivist qualitative paradigm. This research does not include any quantitative, objective findings, which could potentially derive different results. Therefore, a mixed methods approach could obtain results that reflect a larger population of guidance counsellors in relation to their views of collaboration in their work.

6.4 Recommendations

Stemming from the findings of this study, there are several recommendations that may be procured for policy, practice and future research.

6.4.1 Recommendations for Policy:

1. The full re-instatement of ex-quota allocation of hours is needed in guidance counselling to ensure a consistent delivery of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector. This involves the Department of Education taking full responsibility for the allocation of hours, as opposed to giving autonomy to school managements to implement sufficient hours to meet the needs of students and supporting the work of the guidance counsellor.

2. CPD is needed to educate teaching staff on the role of the guidance counsellor and the role of the teacher in achieving the goals of a WSA to guidance counselling. This will ensure the proper implementation of a collaborative WSA to guidance counselling across the post-primary sector.

3. The distribution of resources for guidance counselling needs to increase in voluntary secondary schools to ensure guidance counsellors are supported in providing for the vocational/education and personal/social needs of students in an equal and consistent manner. The needs for increased external supports such as a Home School Liaison officer, Chaplaincy and Behavioural Support was identified by participants as supports that are desired and would greatly benefit the guidance service. These supports should be made available to guidance
counsellors and students irrespective of school type. This will also guarantee increased collaboration in the delivery of guidance.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Practice:

1. Guidance counsellors should continue to, and where possible, enhance collaboration with school management and peer teachers in the endeavour to achieve the goals of the whole-school guidance plan.

2. Guidance counsellors should continue to promote the role of guidance as a means of educating their colleagues on the aims and purposes of guidance counselling. It is also important that guidance counsellors educate teaching staff on the whole-school guidance plan, its aims and objectives and seek genuine collaboration with school management and teaching staff to achieve these goals.

3. Guidance counsellors should aim to develop positive relationships with school management and teaching staff in a professional manner. This encourages awareness of the role of guidance counsellor and increases the possibility of colleagues engaging in collaboration with the guidance counsellor.

4. Guidance counsellor should continue to engage with organised supervision and CPD as a means of supporting them in their work and as a form of collaboration with other guidance counsellors. This creates the opportunity for guidance counsellors to develop strategies to develop and improve the guidance service and reduce the possibility of professional isolation, burnout and empathy fatigue. It is also imperative that guidance counsellors continue to operate under the remit of the Data Protection and Child Protection laws, as well as the Code of Conduct set out by the IGC (2016). In particular, the code of confidentiality should not be jeopardised in an endeavour to achieve a WSA to the personal/social counselling aspect of guidance counselling.

6.4.3 Recommendations for Future Research:

1. Further exploration of the effects of unequal distribution of resources for guidance in the post-primary sector would prove beneficial. This would help identify areas that need more resources in the delivery of guidance.
2. A study of school management’s value on guidance counselling would also be beneficial as it would give insight into the effects of value systems on the profession and delivery of guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector.

6.5 Reflexivity

Patton (2002) states that reflexivity provides the researcher with the opportunity to reflect on how their personal experiences impact on the research process. The research process has proved beneficial to the researcher, heightening their awareness and understanding of how guidance counsellors perceive and achieve collaboration in their work. It also allowed the researcher to identify key advantages and barriers in achieving a collaborative approach. Furthermore, the research findings may prove beneficial in preparing the researcher for the work of guidance counselling. This corresponds with McLeod’s view that research is carried out by practitioners “for the purpose of advancing their own practice” (McLeod, 1999, p8). The researcher acknowledges that previous assumptions, outlined in the methodology chapter, about inadequate collaboration taking place between guidance counsellors and colleagues was not reflected in the findings of this study and that, in many ways, collaboration is a core feature of the work of the guidance counsellor. This study has also helped the researcher to identify ways in which collaboration can be achieved and the many influential facets that encourage and inhibit collaboration. Having acquired this knowledge, the researcher realises the importance of developing skills that foster a collaborative approach to guidance with colleagues. However, the researcher was also exposed to areas that need improvement in policy and practice, to achieve collaboration. Furthermore, the challenges that are facing guidance counsellors, in an increasingly demanding and under-resourced profession, were apparent. Overall, the personal learning from undertaking this research project will assist the researcher in their future practice as a guidance counsellor.

6.6 Conclusion

This research project has exposed, through practitioner narratives, how guidance counsellors perceive the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peer teachers. The participants of this study perceive a collaborative approach in the delivery of guidance as a positive and necessary facet of their work. They also identified the barriers to achieving
collaboration and the changes needed to ensure improvement in their ability to work collaboratively. In particular, increased allocation of hours to guidance and distribution of resources are needed. Moreover, school management and teaching staff need to be further educated about the role of the guidance counsellor and their roles in implementing a whole-school approach to guidance. This will help create a more consistent and reliable guidance service in post-primary schools. Recommendations have been made by the researcher in relation to changes needed in policy and practice as well as identifying areas in need of further research.

In order for guidance counselling to meet the holistic “whole-person” (Gordan, 2010, p50) needs of students, a whole-school, collaborative approach must ensue. With this in mind, the researcher reflected on the personal learning that was gained through the research process, which will prove beneficial in the researcher’s future practice of guidance counselling.
References:


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The Teaching Council of Ireland (2016) ‘Code of Professional Conduct of Teachers’; The Teaching Council, available: [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie) [accessed 22/01/18].


Appendix A
Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory
Appendix B
Subject Information Letter – Chairperson of IGC Branch

EHS REC No.: 2018_02_12

Date:

Research title: An exploratory study of Guidance Counsellors' perception of the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peers in the Post-Primary Sector.

Dear Chairperson,

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 Mr. Tom Geary. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

The overall aim of the research project is to investigate to what extent guidance counsellors perceive their collaborative work with school management to be either effective or ineffective in the post-primary sector. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you could disseminate the information sheet to the guidance counsellors of the IGC branch, inviting the Guidance Counsellor to take part in a voluntary interview about their experience of collaboration in their work as Guidance Counsellors. This interview will be audio recorded.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence. The identity of the Guidance Counsellor and the school name and location will not be disclosed in the research. Participation in the study will be voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the ending of the interview. If the participant wishes to withdraw, they can do so at any time during the interview and up until the point of data analysis. However, when the interview data has been analysis
has been completed, the participant will no longer have the option to opt out of the research. 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 approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the school’s name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

**Researcher:**
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Email: 10002058@studentmail.ul.ie

**Supervisor:**
Mr. Tom Geary,  
Supervisor  
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**Principal Investigator:**
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This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Code number 2018_02_12). 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 No: (061) 234101  
Email: ehs@staffmail.ul.ie
Consent Form – (Chairperson of IGC Branch)

EHS REC No.: 2018_02_12

Research title: An exploratory study of Guidance Counsellors' perception of the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peers in the Post-Primary Sector.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participant and the school will not be revealed in the project of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of the participant and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.

2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the completion of transcription and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.

3. The recorded interview and transcript will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interview 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 Ailish Egan to access the Guidance Counsellors in this IGC branch:
Appendix D
EHS REC No.: 2018_02_12

Date:

**Research title:** An exploratory study of Guidance Counsellors' perception of the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peers in the Post-Primary Sector.

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 Mr. Tom Geary. As part of my studies, I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling. The overall aim of the research project is to investigate to what extent guidance counsellors perceive their collaborative work with school management to be either effective or ineffective in the post-primary sector. In order to gather this information I am writing to you to enquire whether you would be willing to take part in a face to face interview about your experience of professional collaboration in your practice. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete outside of school time. The interview will be audio recorded.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence. Your identity as a participant will not be disclosed in the research study. This will be achieved through the use of pseudonyms in the reporting of the findings. The location and name of the school that you work in will not be disclosed either.

Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the completion of data analysis of interview. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences. The data from the interview will be stored in a secure location in UL, and the information will be stored for seven years. It will then be safely destroyed according to UL guidelines.
If you have any queries or require further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

**Researcher:** Ms. Ailish Egan  
Email: 10002058@studentmail.ul.ie

**Supervisor:**  
Mr. Tom Geary, Research Team Supervisor  
Email: tom.geary@ul.ie

**Principal Investigator:**  
Dr Lucy Hearne,  
School of Education, University of Limerick  
Tel (061) 202931  
Email: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Code number 2018_02_12). 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 No: (061) 234101  
Email: ehs@staffmail.ul.ie
Appendix E
University of Limerick

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Consent Form – (Guidance Counsellor)

EHS REC No.: 2018_02_12

Research title: An exploratory study of Guidance Counsellors’ perception of the collaborative nature of their work with school management and peers in the Post-Primary Sector.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participant and the school will not be revealed in the project of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of the participant and respect their contribution are:

1. I understand what this research project is about, and what the results will be used for.
2. I am fully aware of the procedures and of the risks and the benefits of the study.
3. I am aware that my identity & the school where I work as a guidance counsellor will remain anonymous.
4. I acknowledge that participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement up until data analysis has been completed and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
5. I understand that the data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interview 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 to partake in this interview with Ailish Egan:

Signature: ________________________________

Printed name: ________________________________

Signature of Researcher: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix F
Interview Schedule

Length of Interview: 60 minutes to complete

EHS REC No.: 2018_02_12

Part 1:

Background Information

1. What type of school do you work in as a Guidance Counsellor (Voluntary, Deis, Community etc) and what is the gender base of your school?

2. How many Guidance Counsellors work in your school at present and what hours are allocated to you?

Part 2:

Experience of Collaboration with School Management & Peers

3. To what extent do you feel that collaboration is an integral part or an unimportant part of your work? Please explain.

4. To what degree do you feel sufficiently supported in your role as guidance counsellor by school management? Explain your answer.

5. To what extent do you feel sufficiently supported in your role as guidance counsellor by your colleagues/peers? Explain your answer.

6. Do you have a whole school guidance plan in your school? If so, do you think the whole school guidance plan is implemented effectively by school management and peers?
7. As part of your work as a Guidance Counsellor, do you feel that the whole school guidance approach is effective or ineffective in your school? Why/Why not?

8. What subject departments do you collaborate with as part of your work?

9. In your opinion, is collaboration limited in the work of a guidance counsellor? If so, what are the causes of these limitations?

10. In what ways can a guidance counsellor increase collaboration with peers and school management?

11. The NCGE completed research in 2011 stating that guidance counsellors did not perceive themselves to be sufficiently supported in their work. Do you agree or disagree with this statement in relation to your own experience of working as a guidance counsellor in your school in 2018? Please give reasons for your answer.

12. Respondents of the research by the NCGE (2011) also stated that the counselling aspect of their work was not “formally recognised by the Whole School Process” (NCGE, 2011, p.11). Do you think that the counselling aspect of guidance counselling is shared by your peers and school management? Explain your answer.

13. To what extent do you believe Guidance Counselling is conducive to professional isolation?

14. Empathy fatigue and/or burnout is often associated with the work of counsellors. To what degree do you agree or disagree with this statement?
Appendix G
Braun & Clarke’s Six-Stage Thematic Analysis Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarising yourself with your data:</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes:</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes:</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes:</td>
<td>Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes:</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Producing the report:</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p35)
Appendix H
Excerpts from Reflective Diary

Diary Entry 1:

22nd March, 2018

I have just carried out my pilot interview and I am happy that it went well. It recorded effectively and gave me a chance to practice using the technology and outlining the confidentiality and usage agreement in a clear manner.

However, I was quite nervous and perhaps too conscious that I got the chance to ask all the questions in my interview schedule, which perhaps made it a little too structured. This is valuable learning for me ahead of embarking on the interview process, because I know that I need to ask the questions I intend on asking, but I shouldn’t be afraid to ask participants to elaborate on their thoughts, feelings and experiences so that I am satisfied that I get a full and clear picture of their view of collaboration. I took for granted the importance of listening attentively, as opposed to just getting answers. If I give more focus to listening, then it will be easier to ask other questions and adopt a more semi-structured interview approach.

I am glad that I carried out this pilot, as I feel I have now gotten over the initial fear and have a good idea of what I need to do in the first proper interview.

Diary Entry 2:

12th April, 2018

Today, I will complete by first interview with a participant of the study. I am quite anxious that this interview goes well and that I get the necessary information I need in order to answer my primary and secondary questions of this study. I am also conscious that this is a semi-structured interview and so I know I need to listen attentively and explore potentially fruitful experiences and opinions that will help to satisfy the aim of this study.

I know it is also important for me to watch body language because that may yield insight into how they really feel about collaboration.

Moreover, I have to ensure that I don’t let my own bias influence the study. From my experience on placement, I know that meaningful collaboration isn’t always possible, or in
some cases, I believe it doesn’t exist but this may differ in other settings so I just have to keep an open mind.

Diary Entry 3:

25th April, 2018

I have just finished my fourth interview and it strikes me how similar each participant are in response to certain questions and how, in many ways, despite the cuts and challenges they face in their work, they seem to enjoy their work as guidance counsellors.

In many ways, they have challenged my own bias in relation to how meaningful collaborative experiences can be with peer teachers and management, with most of the participants so far expressing positive experiences. However, there seems to be a common consensus that management have a lot of control in relation to how much collaboration can be achieved and each participant qualifies what collaborative work in a different way; some feel that having a referral system for counselling is effective collaboration, while others try to increase collaboration on a daily basis. The one thing that strikes me is the influence management seems to have on how a guidance counsellor operates.

Again, I must remind myself not to be overtly influenced by previous interviews as I carry out the final two of this research process. So far, I feel I have managed not to allow my own bias to influence my questioning of participants. Also, all the participants seem very open and comfortable answering all of my questions, which is something I was conscious about. The last thing I wanted to do was upset anyone but so far, everything has been very positive.