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OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

**An Exploration of Guidance Counselling Provision in the Youthreach
Programme**

Rosina Kelly Joy

16101928

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Research Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne

University of Limerick,

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Declaration

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

Signature: _____ Rosina Kelly Joy

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List of Abbreviations

ACE's	Adverse Childhood Experiences
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CTC	Community Training Centres
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DSP	Department of Social Protection, Social
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
ELVET	Early Leaving from Vocational Education and Training
ESL	Early School Leaver
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FET	Further Education and Training
HSE	Health Services Executive
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LC	Leaving Certificate
MABS	Money Advice and Budgeting Service
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NCSE	National Council for Special Educational Needs
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Boar
NGF	National Guidance Forum
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development

QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SOLAS	Further Education and Training Authority
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SENI	Special Educational Needs Initiative
UL	University of Limerick

Abstract

The aim of this research study is to explore guidance counselling provision in the Youthreach programme, and provide insights into the role and the activities of guidance practitioners in meeting the needs of Youthreach students.

Across Europe research indicates that there is a need to address the lack of time and staffing allocated to ESL (Hughes and Borbély-Pecze, 2012). Additionally, evidence suggests that to further reduce ESL the role of guidance is critical (CEDEFOP, 2014). Despite this, as recently as 2017 it is still being argued that Youthreach students need more guidance and mentoring than their peers in mainstream schools (Gordon, 2017).

An interpretive paradigm was employed and semi-structured interviews were used to gather the experiences of guidance practitioners in Youthreach in this study. Using an interpretive approach enabled the researcher to understand the everyday realities of the professional practice of the participants who deliver guidance counselling in the Youthreach programme (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

The research findings demonstrate the varying levels of guidance provision based on funding, allocation of resources, attitudes of management and the location of Youthreach centres. Furthermore, the need to establish more formal supports for both guidance practitioners and Youthreach students is highlighted. The findings conclude that the needs of the students attending Youthreach have to be attended to by appropriately trained staff, as mental health issues in the young people have become more prevalent in recent years. In addition, guidance practitioners in Youthreach need to be supported with continuous training and access to supervision for their long-term self-care. Based on the findings, several recommendations are put forward to inform future policy, practice and research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research study in the context of theory, policy and practice relevant to guidance counselling. The context and justification for carrying out the research will be outlined, followed by the researchers' position within the study. The research methodology, aims and objectives of the study are outlined and finally, the chapter concludes with a brief plan of the thesis.

1.1 Context and Justification for the Research Study

This research study explores guidance counselling provision in the Youthreach programme. Currently, Youthreach is situated in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Further Education and Training (FET) sector which is funded and coordinated by SOLAS. Youthreach aims to respond to the often diverse needs of young people, and provide early school leavers (ESL) with a second chance education. In 1998, a study by the Combat Poverty Agency identified that ESL, e.g. students in Youthreach, require a high level of guidance, counselling and psychological support in general (Boldt et al., 1998). However, gaps and lack of clarity surrounding the level of guidance and counselling services offered to students in Youthreach was also identified (Ryan, 1998). The OECD (2004) recommended policy makers to ensure that career guidance is part of community based services which are targeted at ESL. More recently at a European level, the issue of consistent provision is still a concern across Europe, regarding the lack of time and dedicated staff given to address issues related to guidance for ESL's (Hughes and Borbély-Pecze (2012). Research suggests that ESL has more to do with the "push from negative experiences at school ... than the pull of the labour market" (Byrne and Smyth, 2010, p.96).

Furthermore, in second-chance settings such as Youthreach, there is a greater prevalence of complex needs amongst students compared to the general population (European Commission, 2013). It has been found that Youthreach students may be marginalised and alienated and there have been warnings about underestimating mental health concerns and the negative consequences for young people, while highlighting the lack of staff training to deal with such complex issues (McHugh, 2014). Gordon (2007, 2009, 2013, 2017) has consistently argued that Youthreach students need more guidance and mentoring than their peers in mainstream schools. Parents also need to be encouraged and supported to engage

in their children's education (European Commission, 2013), as research has indicated that "career related" support from parents is associated with a students' career aspirations (Hearne et al., 2016).

However, it has been argued that parents of ESL often do not place a high value on education (Gordon, 2017) and the DES Inspectorate in their evaluations of Youthreach centres often recommend more parental involvement (DES, 2010).

Guidance provision in Youthreach comes under FET guidance provision (DES, 2013). There is a multi-disciplinary team in Youthreach who provide education and forms of mentoring and guidance. Core practitioners are guidance counsellors and advocates who are SOLAS funded (DES, 2015). The rationale for this study is as a trainee guidance counsellor, to explore the delivery of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach and gain an insight into the experiences of the practitioners to inform future practice.

1.2 Researcher's Position in this Study

When conducting an interpretivist research study it is necessary for the researcher to state their positionality (Thomas, 2013). In this research study, it is important for the researcher to declare and acknowledge her own position and assumptions on the research area, in addition to her role in the research process (Cohen et al., 2007). The researchers' professional experience as a post primary teacher spans over 25 years, with the first 12 years teaching in the mainstream post primary school system and the remaining 13 teaching in a Youthreach centre as a Business, Literacy and Learning Support teacher. For the past two years as a trainee guidance counsellor the researcher is particularly interested in exploring the current provision of guidance counselling in Youthreach as her centre has a qualified guidance counsellor on staff, and the researcher had always assumed that this was the case in all Youthreach centres. It was not until the researcher embarked on this research study, did she realise that the guidance service in some Youthreach centres is delivered by multi-disciplinary teams offering both guidance, and mentoring supports with the core practitioners being the guidance counsellors and/or the advocate.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of Study

The overarching aim of this research study is to explore the current provision of guidance counselling in Youthreach. Although this is an exploratory study, the researcher hopes to elucidate the nature of Youthreach provision to ESL's of the guidance counselling services

for ESL's such as Youthreach students, as evidence indicates that across Europe there is a lack of support for this vulnerable cohort (OECD, 2014).

The research objectives are:

1. Critically review and analyse the relevant literature from both an international and national perspective, on guidance policy and practice relevant to the Youthreach sector.
2. To gain an understanding of the experiences and insights of the role of the guidance practitioner in the Youthreach setting and the characteristics and needs of the students.
3. To critically examine and interpret the data findings and make recommendations for future practice for guidance practitioners in Youthreach.

1.4 Research Methodology

The researcher used an interpretivist paradigm as the study is interested in people and how they connect (Thomas, 2013). The researcher carried out semi-structured interviews with a sample of guidance counsellors and advocates to gain insights and capture the lived experiences of the guidance practitioners working in Youthreach (Bryman, 2012; Stead et al., 2012; Robson and McCartan, 2016; Thomas, 2013). After transcribing the interviews the researcher used a thematic approach based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6 phase framework. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for uncovering a collection of themes or patterns within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher gave consideration to the critical issues relating to validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethics throughout the methodology used and are addressed in Chapter 3.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 1

This chapter has introduced the context and justification for the research study. It has outlined the researcher's positionality in relation to the study and addressed the research aims and objectives. The methodology of the study is stated, and in conclusion an overview of the six chapters is provided.

Chapter 2

This chapter critically reviews the literature on the research topic from both an international and national perspective. It provides an examination of previous research on guidance policy and practice in Youthreach, the background of the Youthreach programme and the guidance, advocacy and counselling supports. Following this, the literature relating to the characteristics and needs of the Youthreach student is reviewed.

Chapter 3

This chapter describes the paradigm and methodology of the research design frame. The primary and secondary research questions are identified, and the methods of data collection and analysis are detailed. Additionally, this chapter addresses issues of validity and reliability, reflexivity, and ethical issues.

Chapter 4

This chapter presents the analytical strategy adopted in the study and provides a critical discussion of the primary data findings.

Chapter 5

This chapter provides a synthesis of the research findings in the context of the research questions and the literature review.

Chapter 6

This closing chapter provides an overview of the findings of the research study within the context of the aim and objectives. The strengths and limitations of the study are outlined. A number of recommendations for future policy, practice and research are proposed and a concluding reflection on the researcher's personal learning of the research process is offered.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the literature relevant to this specific research study. This is to establish an overview of the provision of guidance counselling in the Youthreach programme which is part of the Further Education and Training Sector (FET). It examines the policies both in Europe and Ireland that have shaped and influenced the development of the guidance service in this area.

The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section examines guidance counselling policy and practice, internationally, nationally, and in the Youthreach programme. The second section discusses the background of the Youthreach programme, guidance, advocacy and counselling support, and an overview of the characteristics and needs of students. The final section examines the relevant human development theories that relate to adolescents in the context of the Youthreach setting.

2.1 Policy and Practice of Guidance Counselling

This section examines definitions of guidance counselling and the policy underpinning guidance, internationally, nationally and focuses specifically on the Youthreach sector. For the purpose of this research, ‘Youthreach’ will relate to all Youthreach centres and will not include Community Training Centres which formerly came under the remit of FÁS (now SOLAS). Some Youthreach centres refer to participants as learners or trainees, whilst others refer to them as students. For the purpose of this research, the term ‘student’ will be used throughout.

2.1.1 Definition of Guidance Counselling

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defined guidance as helping individuals of any age across the lifespan “to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers” (OECD, 2004, p.19). It also highlighted the important role that guidance has in education, especially for laying the foundations for lifelong career development, particularly during certain stages in an individual’s life, and during periods of transition. In 2008 the Council of the European Union included counselling in its Resolution on the integration of lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies.

Guidance is referred to as:

a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills.

(Council of the European Union, 2008, p.2)

Across all European countries, guidance is regarded as a crucial element in stimulating social and economic goals through its support in reducing student drop-out rates, by equipping young people with the skills to support and manage their learning, so that they can successfully cope with the transitions between education, training and work (CEDEFOP, 2010). Additionally, effective guidance provision is the key to enhancing social justice “by mobilizing a panoply of services on behalf of citizens, and especially of vulnerable groups” (Sultana, 2014, p.6). In Europe, guidance services vary with the focus on lifelong career guidance and from an Irish perspective the National Guidance Forum (NGF) interprets guidance as multi-layered:

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

(NGF, 2007, p.6)

In Ireland, in post primary education, guidance and counselling is largely defined as the range of interventions available to support students to make choices about their future. It is a holistic and integrated model of guidance where the three separate areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance are interlinked (DES, 2005; IGC, 2008; NCGE; 1996). Within the guidance context:

Counselling has as its objective the empowerment of students so that they can make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing.

(DES, 2005, p.4)

While the more recent FET policy document, which is pertinent to Youthreach, defines guidance as:

Guidance, counselling and information services incorporating learning options, career options, employment and progression options in the context of matching the right person to the right opportunity.

(DES, 2013, p.112)

2.1.2 European Policy on Guidance Counselling

The European Commission (2001) identified guidance as one of the fundamental strategies for implementing lifelong learning policies and made it a priority area in achieving economic prosperity and social inclusion. In recent years, guidance in Europe has been informed by the Education and Training 2020 strategy (Council of the European Union 2009). The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP, 2008) recognised that while progress had been made, more efforts were needed to improve the quality of guidance services and develop partnerships between existing forms of guidance provision. This led to the 2008 Resolution by the European Council and member states, which emphasised the need to strengthen guidance policy within the framework of national lifelong learning strategies (CEDEFOP, 2008). As a result, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) was established, to support and strengthen networks and develop policies, systems and practices in lifelong guidance by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of education and training.

A common issue across Europe in relation to guidance provision to early school leavers (ESL) has been the lack of time and support for guidance and counselling (CEDEFOP, 2010). Additionally, the impact of the recession was widely felt by young people, resulting in social and economic problems (OECD, 2014). The literature highlights the importance of career guidance policies, especially at important transitions in education (Gracey & Kelly, 2010; Hughes and Borbély–Pecze, 2012; OECD 2010b). Consequently, a number of EU policies emerged as part of the strategy to prevent attrition from education and training and reduce high unemployment. They were designed to strengthen young people’s chances of education and employment and included both preventative and re-integration measures to reduce ESL (European Commission, 2013). In a number of European countries, to combat the challenges facing young people, forms of ‘bridging programmes’ were also introduced (Hughes and Borbély–Pecze, 2012). A successful example of preventative measures to reduce school drop-out rates in Norway, involved a pilot project between 2013 and 2016,

with individuals aged between fifteen and twenty-one years. The project delivered counselling and support to targeted students, “experiencing complex challenges, such as mental health or social problems” (Bachke, 2016, p.2). Similar schemes are in existence in Ireland but mainly in the old FÁS run SOLAS centres. They are offered to facilitate young people back into entry-level employment and training through offering support in career planning and the development of vocational and personal skills (SOLAS, 2014).

The aim of re-integration measures is to provide an alternative to mainstream education in a student-centred learning environment through the ‘whole person’ approach. This measure includes guidance and mentoring to support the young person in their learning and progression, to further education, training or employment (Nevala & Hawley, 2011). In Ireland Youthreach has been identified as one such approach to support ESL (CEDEFOP, 2010; Oomen and Plant 2014). Furthermore, the critical role of guidance in “creating smooth transitions” is highlighted, with good practise advocating a student focussed approach, tailored to the individual needs of the young person (Oomen and Plant, 2014, p.7).

2.1.3 National Policy on Guidance Counselling in Further Education and Training (FET)

Youthreach is part of the FET sector, and is funded *and coordinated* by SOLAS (the Further Education and Training Authority). The delivery of FET is the responsibility of the 16 Educational and Training Boards (ETB’s). SOLAS is responsible for implementing the national FET Strategy which concentrates on addressing unemployment by providing targeted skills programmes (SOLAS, 2014).

The DES (2000) White Paper on Adult Education proposed the establishment of the Adult Educational Guidance Service nationally and the more recent FET strategy, proposes that it will be included into a more integrated Adult Guidance Service (DES, 2000, 2013). Policy on guidance in Ireland is also informed by European policy, where in recent years an important consideration has been the tailoring of lifelong guidance to different target groups, in an effort to reach out to young people who are disengaged from both learning and employment (Borbély-Pecze & Hutchinson, 2013). This is mirrored in the Evaluation of Youthreach (DES, 2010), where it has been suggested that students would benefit from customised guidance to suit their individual needs. This dovetails the tailored curriculum approach advocated in Youthreach, to suit the students who have had negatives experiences previously in the mainstream system (Gordon, 2007). The ideal situation is preparing the

young person to up-skill or re-skill as required, throughout their lifespan, to keep up with an ever-changing workplace, in a globalised economy (DES, 2016).

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee Plan, which was based on the experience and good practice of other countries (OECD, 2014) is another European measure introduced to tackle high youth unemployment and ESL. While it is mainly embedded within employment policies, the main objective is to increase the employability of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Escudero and Mourelo, 2015). A growing body of literature from both a European and national perspective has found that it is mostly students from lower socio-economic groups who fail to succeed in the education system (Barnardos, 2009; Boldt et al., 1998; Byrne & Smyth, 2010; Lynch, 1999; Dale, 2010). In the Irish context, for those aged under eighteen years, Youthreach is seen as a crucial measure to overcome barriers to education and employment as many unemployed young people have few educational qualifications (Department of Social Protection, 2016; European Commission /EACEA /Eurydice/ CEDEFOP, 2014). The FET strategy 2014-2019 (DES, 2013), proposes that:

Everyone who engages with FET whether employed or unemployed or engaging for the purpose of learning has the opportunity to access high quality career guidance.

(DES, 2013, p.45)

Furthermore, guidance and mentoring are two of the core features of compensatory measures to reduce early leaving from vocational education and training (ELVET) (Eurydice & CEDEFOP, 2014, p.13).

2.2 The Youthreach Programme

This section discusses the background of the Youthreach programme and the guidance, advocacy and counselling support in Youthreach. Following this, literature in relation to the characteristics and needs of Youthreach students is reviewed.

2.2.1 Background of the Youthreach Programme

Youthreach has been in existence since 1988 as an alternative to mainstream secondary education in Ireland. It owes its origins to the 1983 European Council Resolution on Vocational Training Policy, also known as the 'Social Guarantee' (McGrath, 2006). It was launched as an inter-departmental response to the needs of young people who had left school early with issues associated with social and educational disadvantage (Byrne and Smyth,

2010; Griffin, 2016; Dale, 2010; Stokes, 2016). In Youthreach, there is a strong vocational component as well as a focus on the transition of young people from school to employment and training (Department of Education and Science, 1995). The Youthreach model is consistent with international best practice in meeting the educational and training needs of young people with low basic skills (O'Connor, 2010).

In 2004, Youthreach centres were designated as “Centres for Education” under the Education Act 1988 (DES, 2004a), although students do not receive the same entitlements, support and provision in terms of special educational needs as their mainstream peers. Currently, Youthreach comes under the Department of Education and Skills (DES), FET programmes. In Ireland, it is estimated that Youthreach accommodates approximately 3,000 of those students who leave school early each year (Gordon, 2017; Stokes, 2016). There are 112 Youthreach centres nationally, based in most cities and large towns and also in a number of smaller towns and villages (Gordon, 2017). Attendance is on a full-time basis usually for a period of two or three years and the students receive a weekly allowance (Stokes, 2016). The student centred-approach is encouraged in Youthreach with an emphasis on rewarding achievement rather than reinforcing failure (Gordon, 2009; Stokes, 2003).

2.2.2 Guidance, Advocacy and Counselling in Youthreach

This study focuses on guidance provision in Youthreach. Research into the provision of guidance, counselling and psychological services in the Youthreach programme has been the subject of several reports and evaluations since 1998 where recommendations have included integrated approaches to consider the needs of the students, staff training, resources and the standard of provision across centres (DES, 1998; Friel & Coulter 2004; Ryan, 1998).

Guidance services in Youthreach include careers and vocational guidance, information services, personal guidance, work experience, psychometric testing, personal development and SPHE (Kearney, 2014). However, not all Youthreach centres have a guidance counsellor on staff, but a professional advocate supports students in the vocational sense, while a qualified therapeutic counsellor may be employed when and if the need arises (NGF 2007). The advocates are funded by SOLAS (formerly FÁS), whose role is to support students in decision-making, referral, progression and placement. Additionally, in some

centre's advocates are instrumental in organising and monitoring students on work experience (SOLAS, 2014).

Research conducted by Gordon (2004) concluded that the majority of Youthreach centres need access to more provision for supports and training. A response to this led to the development of a mentoring programme in Youthreach that is central to the special educational needs initiative (SENI), which was set up by the Department of Education and Skills at the beginning of 2007. This mentoring programme, which plays a major role in the guidance services in these centres, is based on secondary attachment theory, where a keyworker is assigned to mentor a student in their academic, social and interpersonal needs (Gordon, 2013). Previous research highlighted the positive use of attachment theory in post primary educational settings with adolescents who have had poor early attachment experiences (Gordon, 2009; Murray and Pianta, 2007).

The SENI pilot began operating in 20 Youthreach centres from Jan 2007 to June 2008, (although it is still in existence in these centres), to address the needs of the students presenting, to enable them to engage successfully in the Youthreach programme. Findings on the pilot demonstrated the positive effect the interventions had on the development of the students' "emotional and social competencies" leading to significant differences in student outcomes (Gordon, 2013, p.49). Similarly, research from the OECD (2012) has demonstrated that on-going mentoring support from experienced professionals is a useful tool when working with at-risk young people, as it empowers them to develop their learning habits and set goals.

In 2013, the NCGE outlined funding guidelines on the use of guidance, counselling and psychological services in Youthreach. The purpose of the funding was to "increase the capacity of centres to be creative and flexible in their responses" (NCGE, 2013 p.2). This funding allowance was for a visiting service of 5 hours per fortnight for counselling services, as it assumes that staff within centres themselves will deliver the other guidance and counselling functions (DES, 2013). The opportunity to access high quality career guidance is also recognised in the FET Strategy 2014-2019, to help young people make appropriate decisions about their future career paths (SOLAS, 2014). This further corroborates Gordon's recommendation that, staff are supported and trained with the "professional skills needed" to work with Youthreach students (Gordon, 2017, p.54).

Students are supported with progression needs beyond Youthreach into further education, training and employment (DES, 2010). However, there are concerns around barriers and challenges that exist for many students to progress “from centres to viable options” (DES, 2010, p.72). Furthermore, while data is available on student destinations directly from Youthreach, the tracking systems beyond that are not standardised and consistent across all centres (DES, 2010), therefore a full picture of student progression over time is not available. Going forward, under the Whole School Guidance Framework document (NCGE, 2017) it is envisaged that guidance practitioners in Youthreach will offer more intensive supports for students’ transition.

2.2.3 Characteristics and Needs of Youthreach Students

Students attending Youthreach present with an extensive range of issues, including learning difficulties, low motivation, mental and physical health issues, dysfunctional families and a lack of emotional regulation (Gordon, 2009; Ryan 1998; Stokes, 2016). Research suggests that an environment that is supportive, coupled with positive relationships with significant adults, can act as a protective function and support the overall development of students presenting with emotional and behavioural issues (Talbot and Cushing, 2011). The prevalence of disability in the areas of emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and learning difficulties are significantly higher in Youthreach centres than in mainstream schools (Gordon, 2009). Unlike other FET programmes, Youthreach supports young people who are the same age as students in the Junior Cycle, although predominantly in the Senior Cycle of secondary school (NCGE, 2013).

Furthermore, recent research illuminates that some Youthreach students experience “multiple adverse events growing up” described as, adverse childhood experiences (ACE’s) (Gordon, 2017, p.11). This can lead to trauma issues for the developing child, whereas children who have a ‘secure attachment’, with their primary care-giver and encounter the safety that this affords, are able to develop a sense of self and can regulate their feelings and emotions, thereby being able to socialise and empathise with others appropriately (Gordon, 2017). This supports Dooley and Fitzgerald’s (2012) assertion that the presence of ‘one good adult in a young person’s life’ can be very beneficial. In Youthreach, this may be the guidance counsellor, advocate, mentor or teacher, whose role is considered central to support. This highlights the importance placed on classroom relationships and positive attachments, especially with young people at risk (Brendtro and Ness, 1983). An education

can empower an individual rise above disadvantage and develop capacities to succeed (Lynch, 2014). Thus, the value of studying in the Youthreach programme, where the focus is student-led, has been recognised in research studies, as an important element in reintegrating early school leavers, to education (Byrne, & Smyth, 2010), especially considering the higher occurrence of complex needs, in comparison to the overall population (European Commission, 2013).

2.3 Theories of Adolescent Development

This section examines relevant human development theories in the context of the Youthreach student as one model does not fit all (Barnes et al., 2011). Bowlby's (1969) model of early attachment theory explored and proposed that "the root of human personality lies in the earliest childhood relationships" and failure in these relationships can have a lasting effect on a child's progression (Bee, 1995, p.279). In this study, the researcher focuses on the importance of attachment and the development of retrospective secondary attachments that relate to Erikson's life stage model, as "there is a connection between negative early experiences and subsequent psychopathology or mental health problems" (Gordon, 2013, p.38), while Bandura's social learning theory (1977) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), are also considered.

2.3.1 Erikson's Life Stage Model

Erikson's (1959) life stage model is made up of eight stages that consider the whole lifespan. It is psychosocial as development is influenced by both society and culture (Creasey, 2006). In relation to this study, Erikson's propositions in stages 1-5 have relevance in terms of the developmental process of Youthreach students (See Table 2.1 below).

Table 2.1 : Erikson’s 8 Life Stages

Approximate Age	Stage	Focus
Birth to 1 year	Stage 1: Trust vs. Mistrust	Focus on oral sensory activity, develop of self-trust; develop trust of others – secure attachment to caregiver needed
1-3 years	Stage 2: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Focus on muscular – anal activity; develop control over body functions and activities
3-6 years	Stage 3: Initiative vs. Guilt	Focus on motor-genital activity; test limits of self-assertion
6-12 years	Stage 4: Industry vs. Inferiority	Focus on mastery, competence, and productivity
<i>12-18 years</i>	<i>Stage 5 : Identity vs. Role Confusion</i>	<i>Focus on formation of identity, life role and coherent self-concept.</i>
18-30 years	Stage 6 : Intimacy vs. Isolation	Focus on achieving intimate relationships and career direction
30 – late adulthood	Stage 7 : Generativity vs. Stagnation	Focus on fulfilment through creative activity to help future generation
Late adulthood	Stage 8: Ego integrity vs. Despair	Focus on belief in integrity of life, including successes and failures

(Source: Boyd & Bee 2015, p.49)

In particular, the fifth stage is generally the age range of Youthreach students. This stage focuses on *identity versus role confusion*, which if successfully resolved in a young person leads to the development of a firm sense of identity (Boyd and Bee, 2015). Often adolescents become part of peer groups as a form of defence against their unique identity crisis and use these groups as a base of security from which to solve their crisis (Boyd and Bee 2015). Positive attachments afford young people the chance of realising important social, emotional and cognitive tools. Conversely, an absence of these experiences can lead to a young person feeling mistrustful, shame and a sense of inferiority (Erikson, 1968). Identity confusion can also result in a lack of purpose and direction and research has shown that young people not accepted by their peers are less likely to participate in school (Corey, 2011). Furthermore, research by Demir et al. (2010), has demonstrated that adolescents struggling with their identity are more vulnerable to mental health issues, behaviour and substance misuse problems.

Kidd (2006) argues that Erikson's model is relevant to understanding adolescent development in guidance counselling work. It also supports the student in identifying "a safe environment" in which they can grow their own identity (Hamman and Hendricks 2005, p.74). Furthermore, by considering Erikson's theory in the context of the Youthreach setting, it allows for second chances, as it recognises that failures at one stage of development can be rectified by successes at later stages as his theory is across the whole lifespan (Sugarman, 2004). Through the SENI mentoring system, the development of secondary attachments has demonstrated that young people can gain the necessary tools to change the negative models of themselves (Gordon, 2013). However, Erikson has not been without his critics, with Kidd (2006) arguing that Erikson has a somewhat blinkered view of society, while others deem his theory as being overly simplistic for describing each period of development in terms of a 'crisis' (Boyd and Bee, 2015). Furthermore, Sugarman (2004) considers that the generality of the theory may be difficult to prove.

2.3.2 Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's social learning theory contends that a child is heavily shaped by external influences and that learning mostly happens through watching people's behaviour and copying the behaviour of the significant people in their lives (Ali and Graham, 1996; Bandura, 1977). A key concept of Bandura's theory is self-efficacy, defined as "a belief in one's capacity to cause an intended event to occur or to perform a task" (Boyd and Bee, 2015, p.266). A growing body of literature suggests that the use of empathy and positive role-modelling in a supportive and calm environment helps develop self-efficacy in individuals (Bandura, 1977; Gordon, 2009; Sharf, 2013).

With regards to Youthreach, Gordon (2009) maintains that by using the concept of secondary attachment figures in a supportive environment through the use of empathy and role modelling, self-esteem and self-efficacy can be fostered, thus creating an appropriate foundation for learning and development for a young person. Additionally, Sharf (2013) has linked the importance of self-belief and its influence on a young person's career ambition and progression. However, social learning theorists suggest that people learn from models, but this depends on how they interpret situations both cognitively and emotionally. Additionally, Grusec (1992) has critiqued Bandura's lack of attention on the overall picture of development, and the importance of understanding how age-related changes can impact on behaviour.

2.3.3 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Another relevant perspective in understanding the context of a young person's life is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, as you can see where the interconnected contexts of a young person, their family, community, environment, wealth, coupled with their beliefs and values can interact and influence their development (Boyd and Bee, 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's view of the environment is one of an arrangement of nested structures (see figure 2.1 below), where the structures symbolise separate aspects of an individual's circumstances.

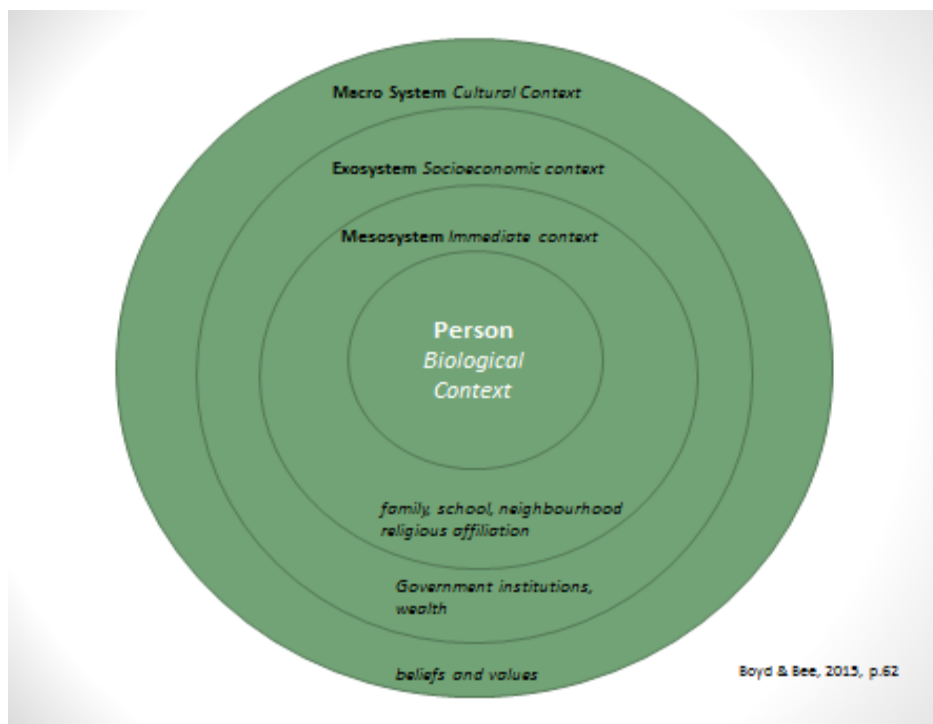


Figure: 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

In the context of the biological system, a person's genetic temperament and developmental stage are considered (Boyd & Bee, 2015). In the mesosystem, the consideration in the immediate context, considers the systems which the young person is directly exposed to including; family, school, community and religion. The exosystem considers the socioeconomic context and includes the various institutions of the culture that impact on development more indirectly – education institutions (free education, funding); employment institutions (social welfare supports). While in the macrosystem, considers the cultural context, and includes the values and beliefs of the culture in which the child is growing up and society's beliefs on education, employment. Each layer of the environment is influenced

and interacts with others and has the power to affect how a young person can grow and develop (Berk, 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; O' Toole et al., 2013).

While Bronfenbrenner (1979) advocated linking with families as this further supports the student in terms of their parents and families understanding their educational goals and also improves parental behaviours. A healthy ecology is one where the young person has a good family bond, where discipline is positive and there are good peer relationships, school is supportive, and they are achieving academic success (Jamal et al., 2013). On the other hand, a high-risk ecology is where a young person has an insecure bond with their family, discipline is inconsistent with evidence of peer conflict and anti-social values, while at school there is conflict with teachers and academic failure. In alternative educational settings, staff need to support the young people with healthy challenges, so they do not socially withdraw (O'Brien, et al., 2001). However, the limitations of Bronfenbrenner's model are that it may be difficult to apply in a balanced way, as all factors need to be considered and understood, thereby making it difficult to implement in practice (Watts et al., 2009).

2.4 Conclusion

Over the years, there have been numerous studies conducted, examining the delivery of guidance in Youthreach. There have also been some developments and initiatives implemented in an effort to meet the complex and changing needs of ESL in both Europe and Ireland to increase their employability. However, it is also evident that despite research and initiatives there are still gaps in provision and a lack of clarity on the level of guidance and counselling services offered to Youthreach students. The SENI that was set up in 2007, where student mentoring plays a major role in the guidance services, is still in operation but has yet to be rolled out nationally despite a positive evaluation. However, it appears to have created a two-tier system within the Youthreach programme with the 20 participating centres receiving extra funding for supports, while the other centres do not. This, coupled with the reported rise in mental health issues amongst Youthreach students, is a growing concern and needs to be further addressed with the appropriate supports and training.

In conclusion, the focus of this current study will be an exploration of the current provision of guidance counselling in Youthreach to establish levels of current practice. Chapter three presents the methodology and methods adopted in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodological approach underpinning the study and identify the primary and secondary research questions. It also addresses the methods used for data collection, sampling and data analysis. Finally, issues relating to validity and reliability, ethics, and reflexivity are addressed.

3.1 Research Questions

Thomas (2013) asserts that research is about looking for an answer rather than trying to prove something. Robson (2007, p.13) posits that “worthwhile research can be mainly concerned with exploration”. Furthermore, Bryman (2012) argues that devising appropriate research questions is a crucial yet challenging aspect of the research study. In this study the primary research question asks, “*How is guidance counselling currently provided to students in Youthreach?*”

The secondary research questions are:

1. *What is involved in the role of the guidance practitioner in Youthreach?*
2. *What type of guidance activities are provided to Youthreach students?*
3. *What are the current guidance counselling needs of the students in Youthreach?*

The next section will discuss the methodology employed to address these research questions in the project design.

3.2 Methodology: Interpretivist (Qualitative)

According to Thomas (2013), methodology looks beyond the description of methods used in a research study. It is about examining the reasons why an approach was used over other methods, and critically reflecting on the limitations of the method. He proposes that this element of the research design has to consider the researcher’s expectancies and factors such as, what the researcher is hoping to achieve from the study, how the researcher intends to access participants and the timeframe of the research (Thomas, 2013).

In this study the interpretivist approach was identified as the most appropriate paradigm to investigate the topic of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach. Hearne (2013) outlines the importance of opting for an appropriate paradigm and methodology as they offer

the foundation from which to build and develop the research. A paradigm is “a set of assumptions about the social world, and about what constitutes proper techniques and topics for inquiry” (Punch, 2005, p.27). There are two main research paradigms, i.e. quantitative (positivism) and qualitative (interpretivism) (Bryman, 2012; Thomas, 2013). Positivism focuses on facts and figures, claims that reality can be measured scientifically and proposes that the world can be studied objectively without researcher bias. Conversely, interpretivism considers that the social world is constructed in different ways for individuals, depending on their situation and is susceptible to bias (Bryman, 2012; Thomas, 2013).

In guidance contexts, a paradigm is a belief system representing the view of the researcher (Patton and McMahon, 2006). For example, in guidance research the over-emphasis on the positivist approach to secure evidence of provision of outcomes has been stressed (Bimrose and Hearne, 2012). In recent years there has been a call to look beyond the positivist approach towards the constructivist approach which argues that people construct meaning founded on their own experiences (Savickas, 2011). Similarly, Herr and Anderson (2014) consider interpretivism as a way of exploring and analysing peoples’ tendencies. In terms of qualitative research, researchers need to address issues of bias, ethics and trustworthiness, as rigour is deemed a concern (Bimrose and Hearne, 2012; Stead et al., 2012).

In this study the researcher wished to embark on a research area of interest to her and endeavoured to understand and interpret the views of those involved, while being mindful of how her own bias and disposition can affect her interpretations (Bell, 2010). Thus the interpretivist approach was more suitable as it demonstrates an interest in people and the manner in which they connect (Thomas, 2013). This approach enabled the researcher to observe through the lens of the participants in the research study, thereby providing responses that were deeper and insightful, rather than the quantitative approach that does not take into consideration expressions of emotions or feelings (Bryman, 2012; Walliman, 2005).

The researcher has worked in the Youthreach programme for the past 12 years’ and considers herself as “an insider interacting with participants” (Thomas, 2013, p.111). The researcher was interested in learning about the individual experiences of a group of participants (Youthreach guidance practitioners) and what is occurring in practice through their own eyes (Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Patton and McMahon, 2006). A strength of the

interpretivist (qualitative) approach is that it afforded a space where the Youthreach practitioners were able to disclose what is real for them (Smyth and Hattam, 2001). A further strength was the opening up of new pathways in illuminating and understanding their lived experiences (Stead et al., 2012; Thomas, 2013). The small sample size also allowed the researcher to draw out thick descriptions from the insights and experiences of the individual interviewees which quantitative research cannot achieve (Bryman, 2012; Thomas, 2013). However, this approach is often criticised as the responses to qualitative research are open to interpretation if the researcher adopts a subjective, rather than an objective, stance (Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Another criticism is that it does not afford a platform for larger conclusions, as it is only producing data based on small research sample sizes (Thomas, 2013).

3.3 Methods of Data Collection

In this section the sampling strategy and the methods used for data collection are discussed. The process of data collection can be referred to as fieldwork and the methods used are considered as the practical tools to collect the information (Blaxter et al., 2010).

3.3.1 Access and Sampling

The researcher employed purposive sampling to access participants for the study. As the name suggests it is intentionally selective as it involves choosing participants on the basis of their experience and knowledge (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2013). However, the disadvantage of this type of sampling is that it does not represent the wider population (Cohen et al., 2011), although Robson (2007) argues that it is acceptable as long as it is acknowledged in the study.

Once the researcher gained ethical approval from the University of Limerick in March 2018 the fieldwork process commenced. Fugard and Potts (2015) propose that for small projects 6-10 participants are recommended for interview. Therefore, the researcher interviewed six guidance practitioners who included four guidance counsellors and two advocates. The researcher sourced the participants directly from Youthreach centres by contacting twenty-four individual centres to ascertain the name of the guidance counsellor or advocate working in that particular centre. Following this, the researcher contacted the practitioners directly requesting their voluntariness to participate in the interview process and forwarded them a

detailed volunteer subject information sheet and consent form (Appendix A & B) (Bryman, 2012).

The demographic information on the participants involved is provided in Table 3.1.

Participant Pseudonyms	Professional Role	Gender	Professional Qualifications	Guidance Provision	Youthreach Location	Years in Youthreach Service
Tina	Guidance Counsellor	Female	Teacher/Diploma in Guidance Counselling	Group & 1-1	City	15 +
Sue	Advocate	Female	Teacher/Diploma in Adult Guidance	1-1	Rural	18
Tom	Guidance Counsellor	Male	Teacher/Diploma in Guidance Counselling	Group & 1-1	Rural	20 +
Jane	Guidance Counsellor	Female	Degree / Diploma in Adult Guidance	Group & 1-1	City	10
Liz	Advocate	Female	Teacher/ SOLAS trained Advocate	1-1	Rural	20 +
Angela	Guidance Counsellor	Female	Teacher/Diploma in Guidance Counselling	Group & 1-1	Rura l	20

Table 3.1 Demographic information on the participants involved

The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity prior to the interview process. The interviews took place between April and May 2018 at a time and location conducive to the participant. The interviews were recorded using a digital device and after each interview they were transcribed by the researcher and a copy was emailed to each participant for respondent validation and to ensure accuracy of content.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview approach was employed to collect the data from the participants. An interview is “a discussion with someone in which you try to get information from them” (Thomas, 2013, p.194). In qualitative research, interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Merriman & Tisdell, 2015). In structured interviews, the interviewer asks the same standardised questions, similar to a written survey (Merriman & Tisdell, 2015). However, this type of interview was deemed inflexible as it would not allow the interviewer to probe and follow up on any thought provoking comments or observations made by the participants (Thomas, 2013). In contrast, unstructured interviews can be useful when the researcher does not know enough about a topic, so the interviewee leads the

interview and establishes the agenda (Thomas, 2013). However, Robson (2007) advises the novice researcher to avoid this type of interview.

In this study, a more flexible approach was necessary to allow for a deeper insight into the participants experience as a guidance practitioner in Youthreach. The semi-structured method gave the researcher the opportunity to gather information so as to obtain richer responses (Robson, 2007). The format allowed the researcher to keep more of an open mind (Bryman, 2012), and was flexible enough to allow for probing when required, while still maintaining structure in the interview process (Thomas, 2013). The interview participants brought their own personal insights and experiences to the research, while still maintaining a set number of issues to be addressed (Patton 2015; Thomas, 2013).

The researcher carried out four face to face interviews and two telephone interviews. An interview framework guided the interview process which included areas of exploration arising from issues identified in the literature review and the researcher's professional practice in Youthreach (Appendix F). The framework included open ended questions to enable the participants to share their experiences, opinions and lived realities (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2001). Furthermore, the researcher used core interviewing skills developed in her training as a trainee guidance counsellor, such as active listening skills, empathy and positive regard to develop rapport and trust, whilst also enabling her the opportunity to observe body language, tone and facial expressions, particularly in the face to face interviews (Bell, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Hennink et al., 2011; McLeod, 2011; Nelson- Jones, 2005).

Telephone interviews have become an increasingly popular tool with the main advantage being a decrease in cost and travel time (Robson, 2007). Denscombe (2007) argues that people are as honest over the telephone as they are face to face. Novik (2008) contends that by conducting interviews over the telephone, the interviewee will feel relaxed and more likely to disclose information. The researcher concurs as the depth and honesty of the data collected from the two telephone interviews testifies to this. Nevertheless others would argue that, while it is still possible to establish empathy, the limitations of this method include not being able to see non-verbal cues, nuances or the participant's reaction to a particular topic or question by observing their body language (Robson, 2007).

A strength of the interview method was the opportunity it afforded the researcher to gather and meticulously examine the participants' narrative stories of their social worlds

(Silverman, 2011), which in turn enabled her to access and explore at a deeper level, the participants experience and perspectives on their professional practice in one type of educational service. In terms of limitations, the element of time was an issue as the interviews were time consuming to arrange and conduct (Robson, 2007). The transcription and analysis of the data took time, as the researcher transcribed each interview verbatim for the data analysis process. Finally, although Robson (2007) highlights the issue of reactivity where the participant may be biased or establishes a poor rapport with the researcher - this did not occur.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

On completion of the interviews the researcher used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase framework of thematic analysis to uncover a collection of themes or patterns in the data sets. These themes are the most important elements of the analysis as they inform the lived experiences of the participants and help make sense of the data, by illuminating new insights for the researcher (Bell, 2010; Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011; Thomas, 2013).

The constant comparison method was used which involved transcribing the interviews and carefully sifting through each one, line by line repeatedly, looking for connections and links and patterns and using codes to find emerging themes and interpreting these themes (Cohen et al., 2011). This method will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.5 Validity and Reliability in Interpretivist Research

This section will discuss the issue of validity and reliability in terms of trustworthiness in the current study. No matter what method is used for collecting the data, the researcher must critically examine the extent the method "is likely to be reliable and valid" (Bell, 2010, p.119). Thomas (2013) argues that the terms validity and reliability are more about quantitative research methods than qualitative. In the positivist paradigm validity and reliability are generally built into the study design. However, in the interpretivist paradigm results are more subjective and less scientific in nature; therefore other forms of criteria are necessary to ensure validity and reliability (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015).

The term validity denotes how accurately an account characterises the lived experience and realities of the research participants. In qualitative research, validity can be determined by the honesty and depth of the data collected in the research (Curtis et al., 2014 and Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, validity is about the trustworthiness and credibility of research

outcomes; whether or not something actually measures what it claims to measure (Robson, 2007).

Reliability represents how much a research tool such as like a questionnaire or a test will provide the same results when taken at different times (Thomas 2013). Bryman (2012) contends that qualitative researchers use these terms in the same way as quantitative researchers when endeavouring to develop standards to measure and assess research. He posits the matter of “ecological validity” which links to the genuineness of the research method used with significant relevance to qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p.48).

This study employed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four key criteria for validity in qualitative research; credibility (validity), transferability (generalizability), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) of data. Research credibility was achieved by means of the careful recording of interviews and after each interview the researcher sent the transcripts to all the participants to check for accuracy of content (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

Transferability in qualitative research looks at the extent to which research results can be transferred, or made generalizable, to other groups of people or context, although it can be argued that this is more associated with quantitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Transferability involves a detailed description of the setting studied to allow for the applicability of findings to other similar settings (Hearne, 2009). In this study, the researcher proposes that the findings may be ‘typical’ of situations in other Youthreach centres nationally.

The dependability and reliability of the research involved the critical self-reflexive use of a research diary, a record of the participant’s responses and notes on discussions and decisions made with the research supervisor which were recorded throughout the research process (Hearne, 2009). Finally, confirmability which is concerned with objectivity, acknowledges that while it is impossible to be completely objective (Cohen et al., 2011), this qualitative researcher endeavoured to act in good faith to ensure that her own values did not influence the research process. This is addressed in the next section.

3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity has many meanings, but pertaining to qualitative research, it relates to the critical consideration of the research itself, as both a practice and a process on a person’s role as the researcher and their relation to the information and knowledge (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Associated with the integrity of qualitative research is the researcher's position or reflexivity which is how the researcher influences and is affected by the research process (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Reflexivity is concerned with being aware of how our own experiences, thoughts and emotions inform us throughout the research process (Etherington, 2004).

Throughout this study, the researcher has been mindful that she is part of the social world that is being researched as she is also employed in Youthreach. She acknowledges how the impact of her history, experiences and characteristics can have on the research itself and the need to closely monitor her interactions and reactions throughout the research process (Berger, 2015; Cohen et al., 2011). This echoes Simburger's (2014, p.58) view of reflexivity in the context of "the paradox of being inside and outside at the same time" when doing research. Therefore, it was important at the outset that this researcher gave details of her own position and assumptions regarding the study. The researcher is a qualified secondary school teacher who has been employed for almost 13 years in a Youthreach centre. At the start of the study, the researcher assumed that all Youthreach centres employed a qualified guidance counsellor. She also had an impression that there may be an external perception that teaching in Youthreach is not highly regarded outside of this unique setting. Consequently, the researcher was continually cognisant of this throughout the research process and echoes Tracy's (2010) view that the practice of self-reflexivity encourages the researcher to be honest regarding his/her own strengths and limitations.

The reflexive process was supported by means of regular supervision with the research supervisor and an accredited external personal counsellor. The use of a reflexive diary also helped the researcher to organise her thoughts throughout the process and ensure that the researcher remained as critically objective as possible (Mertens, 2010). Even though the researcher does not work as a guidance counsellor yet, she could identify with a lot of the issues raised during the research interviews. At times she has had to self-monitor to avoid getting involved in conversations with the interviewees' to ensure she did not contaminate their narratives and lived experiences.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This section will address the ethical approval process and ethical guidelines employed in this research. Thomas (2013) regards ethics as a set of principles of conduct vis-à-vis what is right and wrong and the researchers respect for others. Recent literature raises awareness on the growing importance of adhering to ethical standards that must be followed when

carrying out qualitative research (Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011; Walliman, 2011). As a trainee guidance practitioner it is the researcher's ethical responsibility to safeguard the participants from being manipulated and taken advantage of in the quest for new data (Hearne, 2013).

Ethics in research can be summarised as the "theory, codes and practices concerned with ensuring we do research in a moral and non-harmful manner" (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.330). Similar to a guidance counsellor's ethical responsibilities regarding duty of care to clients, a key concern for this researcher, who is a trainee practitioner, was a duty of care to the research participants who volunteered their time and energy to the study. The researcher was cognisant that the Youthreach sector is small and issues of confidentiality surrounding the participants was a major priority.

It was important for this researcher to be mindful that ethical issues could occur throughout each stage of the research process (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher followed the three different levels of ethical regulation in research practice as identified by Cohen et al., (2007); legislative, professional and personal. Firstly, the researcher gained full ethical approval from the University of Limerick (UL) Education and Health Sciences Ethics Committee in March 2018.

Secondly, the research design was underpinned by an ethical code framework and set of guiding principles. As a member of the professional body, the researcher was guided by the four key ethical principles outlined in the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC, 2012) *Code of Ethics*. The National Centre for Guidance in Education's (NCGE, 2008) *Research Code of Ethics* outlines similar practices; respect for the rights and dignity of the client, competence, dignity and integrity. These principles correspond with the five ethical principles in guidance and counselling research outlined by Hearne (2013) and McLeod (2010); beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, fidelity and justice. They provided this researcher with a reference point to carry out ethically sound research and to make judicious decisions to support her in dealing with any issues that might have occurred. The main ethical considerations in this research were confidentiality and informed consent (Hearne, 2013). The procedures to gain consent involved supplying an information letter to the participants (Appendix A and B), a signed consent form was provided by the participants prior to the interview (McLeod, 2010). As participation was voluntary, participants had the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase without

prejudice (Hearne, 2013; McLeod, 2010). Confidentiality was further safeguarded through the use of pseudonyms and non-identification of the location of the participants' place of work (O'Donoghue, 2006; Thomas, 2013). The audio recordings were deleted immediately after the transcriptions were completed.

Thirdly, as addressed in 3.6, on a personal level, the researcher adopted continuous 'ethical reflexivity' and a keen discernment in the decision-making process (Cohen et al., 2007; McLeod, 2010). Bryman (2012) argues that because researchers reflect on the ethical limitations of their research, this implies that as researchers, they recognise their social responsibilities how their research is conducted. The researcher believed this was achieved this throughout the research process.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology underpinning this study, chapter 4 will discuss the data analysis strategy used and present the findings from the interviews.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the data analysis strategy and the findings from the semi-structured interviews with the six guidance practitioners. After conducting the interviews, the researcher analysed the data using thematic mapping as the meanings were constructed by the participants themselves (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Thomas 2013). In the reporting of the findings ethical standards are applied; to ensure anonymity, the researcher uses pseudonyms and does not disclose the geographical location of the participants, as the Youthreach sector is small and the issue of confidentiality is a major priority.

4.1 Data Analysis Strategy

By using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach to analyse the data collected from the six interviews, the researcher gained an "in depth understanding of individual experiences" (Kidd, 2006, p.86). Phase one involved the researcher transcribing the interviews and going through the transcripts by carefully reading and re-reading them to become familiar with the data. This first phase provided the foundation for the subsequent analysis. Phase two involved the researcher generating initial codes to identify and describe important features of the data that were interesting and meaningful to the topic. Phase three was the start of the interpretive analysis, which involved the researcher using constant comparisons while searching for patterns in the data. In phase four the researcher reviewed and reflected on potential themes and made connections across themes. In phase five, the researcher categorised and named the themes and linked them to the research questions. Finally, in phase six, the primary findings are presented in this chapter, which involves integration and interpretation of the results (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Two major themes and several sub-themes materialised from the data and provide a snapshot of the experiences of the guidance practitioners in Youthreach centres:

1. Guidance Counselling in Youthreach-: Role and Provision
2. Supports for the role of the Youthreach Guidance Practitioner in Youthreach

In the next section the contextual background of the six practitioners will be summarised (See also Chapter 3, Table 3.1).

4.2 Context of Practice of Participants

The research focussed on the experiences of four guidance counsellors: Tina, Jane, Tom and Angela, and two advocates; Liz and Sue. All of them had between ten and twenty-five years' experience in their respective roles. Guidance counselling provision and supports varied across the different Youthreach centres where the guidance counsellors work. Tina works three days a week in a Youthreach centre where she teaches the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) modules relating to guidance and career planning, but is inclined to focus on this in year two of the course. She meets all new students individually to create a profile and thereafter tries to meet them each term; although this varies if another student is having a crisis as this takes precedence, which "is a regular occurrence". Jane works one morning a week in Youthreach, and in that time she meets the three class groups; a fifth and sixth year Leaving Certificate (LC) group and one LCA group. The rest of the morning is spent meeting students on a one-to-one basis, mostly regarding personal issues.

Tom is employed full time in a Youthreach centre and, as well as offering one-to-one support through career guidance and counselling, he delivers QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) modules and SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) to class groups. Angela works three days a week in a mainstream secondary school as a guidance counsellor, and two days a week in a Youthreach centre. In her Youthreach role, contingent on the needs of the students, she teaches various QQI modules including, Career Planning, Work Experience, Personal Effectiveness and SPHE, in addition to one-to-one guidance and counselling.

The two advocates work part-time in their different Youthreach centres, where they are dedicated to supporting students on a one-to-one basis only. An advocate's remit, according to Sue, includes "building relationships" and "dealing with issues and problems on a daily basis". However, the more serious issues are referred to a therapeutic counsellor who attends one day a week in Sue's centre, and in Liz's centre a therapeutic counsellor attends three days a week as part of the Special Educational Needs Initiative (SENI) pilot programme.

4.3 Theme 1- Guidance Counselling in Youthreach: Role and Provision

The first theme addresses the role and provision of guidance counselling in Youthreach through the lens of the interviewees in their respective centres. The findings are presented under three sub-themes:

1. Characteristics and needs of students in Youthreach
2. Types of guidance activities, including factors that help or inhibit the role of the guidance practitioner
3. Positive and challenging aspects of the role and advice to new guidance practitioners

4.3.1 Characteristics and Needs of Students in Youthreach

The characteristics and needs of the students who attend Youthreach are very similar across all of the centres in this study. As highlighted by all the practitioners they include: dysfunctional families, blended families, chaotic lifestyles, negative school experiences, low self-esteem, behavioural issues, learning disabilities - both diagnosed and undiagnosed, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), social issues, disadvantage, alcohol and drug misuse and mental health issues. Angela stated that family circumstances beyond the students' control often influence their situation. Angela has experienced some parents ignoring any attempts at engagement, resulting in absolutely "no communication with the centre". She observed that some students are "growing up in families where they have never had trusting relationships" and "the whole attachment theory", and how some students "have really lost out on that area of early bonding". Additionally, she pointed out that they have had several "middle class" students where "the school system just didn't work for them". Tina notes that "no student drops out of mainstream, there is always a reason for that to happen". She added that, for many students "a lot was outside of themselves".

Tom referred to "the different" student, which includes Travellers, non-Irish, and the transient student who passes seasonally through the town. Similarly, Liz spoke of young people coming through the care system and the non- Irish student. Sue noted "by the time they come to us they generally feel that school hasn't been a good experience, so they are low, and we pick them up".

Across all of the centres there was a range of student needs that the practitioners work with, although all participants commented that in recent years there has been a significant increase in mental health issues. Both Sue and Liz reflected that in the early days there were no

counselling or mentoring services, and therefore, considered this recent rise is due to a greater awareness of mental health issues. As Liz commented, “people are more forthcoming about telling you about their mental health issues”, while Sue added that staff are now trained to recognise and deal with such issues. Tom has also seen an increase in incidents arising from gaming causing sleep deprivation leading to anxiety. Other issues highlighted by him include students “self-medicating through marijuana” and “minority sexuality areas”. Tina commented on the rise in the use and misuse of social media, resulting in bullying due to the “lack of boundaries around social media”, and Liz remarked on the negative side of social media, as it “has contributed to peoples’ feelings of self-worth”.

4.3.2 Type of guidance activities, including factors that help or hinder the role of the guidance practitioner

The four guidance counsellors reported using the person centred approach in their one-to-one guidance work with students in Youthreach. In addition, Tina uses Glasser’s reality therapy to empower the students to take responsibility for themselves and their own actions. Tom referred to the importance of “being present”, and Angela referred to doing what she “can do in the moment” and being the “person who listens”. While Jane agreed they are not all interested in going to college, so it is necessary to “tailor” the classes to meet the needs of the students who are in front of you at that time. She supports focussing “on where they are at, just take them as they are”. This was echoed by Tina, “it is important for me not to have ambitions for them that they don’t have for themselves, as there is so much going on in their lives”.

All of the four guidance counsellors deemed the guidance counselling support adequate in their centre, as in addition to themselves’, they have access to therapeutic counselling or specialist services that can be bought in through the centre budget, which is seen as helpful. Moreover, some centres have staff working as key workers/mentors with a number of students, where the staff member meets regularly with the student to offer support in dealing with day-to-day issues. Interestingly, in Tom’s centre, even though they have two qualified guidance counsellors on staff, they use the counselling budget to also employ a therapeutic counsellor. The idea is to “normalise counselling” so that in the future the students are aware of its existence and can seek the appropriate support if required.

Liz, an advocate, also described employing a “tailor-made” approach for individual students, as “it is about matching the needs of the students in a realistic way”. In addition, she

reflected that past experience has taught her “to keep it real”. Sue discussed her one-to-one support, where she “is often dealing with conflict”, it is “all of the listening and setting goals”, and more importantly making these goals “achievable” because if they are not “they are going to lose interest”.

Both the advocates, Sue and Liz, link in and support the teacher delivering the guidance module in their centre as they do not have a guidance counsellor on staff. They have access to a therapeutic counsellor for student referrals for a set number of hours a week. As Liz’s centre is one of the national SENI centres they receives additional funding towards supporting the students, enabling the counselling services to come in for three days a week to meet students. Conversely, Sue the other advocate, argued that her centre does not have adequate access to guidance counselling support as their students only have access to counselling services for one day a week, articulating that the difficult student is always accommodated over the quiet student, who have as many issues but “doesn’t put their head above the parapet”. This demonstrates that even within the Youthreach programme, there are inequalities based on whether the centre is part of the SENI.

In terms of keeping students on the programme, in Sue’s centre helpful guidance strategies include developing links with home, by making telephone calls directly to the students and their parents or guardians, if they are under 18. In addition, while incentives for students include sport or day trips and personalising timetables, Sue debated on the shortcoming of this strategy as “sometimes they need the structure of the full day as they can slip away”.

Another aspect of the guidance role is the tracking of students’ progression after they complete the programme which appeared to be different in the individual centres. Overall, although there was evidence of short-term tracking by the guidance counsellors, they do not track students long-term, due to time constraints. Both advocates, Sue and Liz, track students in the short-term after they leave, and where possible they continue to link in with them for up to six months. For Sue, this includes students “coming back any time to write up a curriculum vitae (CV) or interview preparation”, while Liz has an “open door policy” that enables the students to return any time they need help to prepare a CV or for an interview. Liz also meets the students for a coffee if they have gone onto the local Further Education (FE) College as she has found from experience that if a student is going to drop out “it is normally around week ten”. Angela felt that closer links should be made with the FE colleges to support students from dropping out, as “they can’t cope with the volume of

work...they need more support” in their chosen courses. In addition, Angela considered that, “sometimes they are not prepared to ask for the help either, they go to college and they feel embarrassed and a bit stupid”. Sue concurred stating that “the theory can become an issue for them”.

To combat the issue of attrition, Angela, Liz and Sue individually discussed the need for an additional progression programme that linked in with an FE college course after completing the Youthreach programme at Level Four. All three practitioners considered this was needed to prevent students from dropping out of Level Five courses, as many cannot cope with the workload or the demands of the academic requirements. The three discussed the need for some form of “bridging” programme at a higher level than QQI Level Four, but not quite at the level of a QQI Level Five. Sue called it a “level Four Plus” progression course. Angela proposed that the linked work experience which is funded by SOLAS, and is a model of progression offered by Community Training Centres (CTC’s) should be duplicated in all Youthreach centres, as the students are still getting the vital “support for up to a year or two after they leave”. She added they are developing a scheme involving work experience with the purpose of “linking” in with FE colleges and the students themselves, in an effort to make “it more meaningful” and successful. Liz and Sue’s centres already have introduced initiatives under different names, but all are essentially “bridging” programmes, in an effort to make the transition to a Level Five FE course or employment and training a positive and successful experience for Youthreach students.

Another issue related to the role raised by Angela is a concern about the “lack of training” of Youthreach staff in their role as key working/mentoring, and sometimes the lack of awareness around “boundaries” and “professionalism” surrounding the duties and role of the key worker. She felt this hindered her role as “there are times when I think they are doing my job” and “they are parachuting people in to do a bit of this and a bit of that”. She was also concerned about the perception that the ad-hoc nature of buying in the services of “a counsellor” as it contributes to the perception that the role of the guidance counsellor is not a vital one. However, this was not highlighted as an issue by the other practitioners.

4.3.3 Positive and Challenging aspects of the role, and advice to new practitioners

This sub-theme addresses the positive and challenging aspects of the guidance role in Youthreach, be it guidance counsellor or advocate. It also considers the advice the

practitioners would give to a new guidance professional considering working in a Youthreach setting.

All of the guidance practitioners articulated that the most positive aspect of their role is working with the students. Liz commented that success is when the students “blossom and flourish”, both in the academic and social sense. Sue believes, “progression”, is not just in an academic sense but also “seeing a young person work through issues or learn how to deal with them”, when “you see their values change a little bit, they are more aware of others and better able to integrate with society...less conflict in their lives”. For Tina it is about the students finding “a sense of belonging in the centre and friends” and where “the students engage and use the space”. Jane noted that “moving on” and “going to college is a big deal considering the difficult situations that they are coming from”, and the importance of supporting the students in “moving forward”. Tom talked about “when students make it through” and “when they trust me to tell me about their lives”, which is important as many have trust issues.

Another positive aspect of the role is the strong belief the practitioners have in Youthreach as a progression route for young people. Three of the practitioners commented on this with Tina noting that:

In a Youthreach setting the expectation is that they are not going to progress on the same way as mainstream students. However, sometimes they absolutely do eventually, but it might take them a little bit longer.

(Tina)

Two analogies put forward demonstrate their belief in the purpose of the Youthreach programme. Sue referred to it as the “scenic route through education”, while Tom likened it to “the country bus of education, we go slowly from village to village but we get there eventually”. However, while all of them agreed that there is a place in the education system for the Youthreach programme, Angela proposed Youthreach is now being run more like a business, where it is about numbers and progression. She felt it should not be this way, as; “Youthreach is different, it needs a lot more support, it needs the psychological services, access to assessments and all of that”.

In addition, with regard to articulating the challenging aspects of the role the researcher noted that the mood of the interviewees was more sombre. Tom, Jane and Angela spoke of the prevalence of youth “suicide” in their centres and the ripple effect it has on all of the

students and staff. Drugs, alcohol and mental health issues are “getting bigger” according to Sue and Liz. While Liz added “the mental battles people face is hard”. Furthermore, Tina cited “poor attendance” and “behaviours” as challenging aspects of the role.

The interviewees were then asked about the advice they would give to a new practitioner working in a Youthreach centre. In light of the challenging aspects mentioned earlier, that are common to all centres, Liz advised that “you go in, do your work, but when you leave at the end of the day, leave it there, need to protect yourself, detach and be aware”. Jane echoed this, as she finds “they bring a lot of baggage...focus on where they are at”. Angela advised to be “clear about boundaries...be clear in a respectful way”. She also endorsed the importance of “linking in with staff” and to be mindful that it is a meaningful profession and to “follow the code of ethics”. Furthermore, Angela added that Youthreach students “can spot a fake” as they instinctively “can tell right off if you like them or not”. Similarly, Liz reflected that “these kids know if you understand, are being judgemental or not”. Tom reflected “as guidance counsellors, if we can help people to be a little better, a little happier, the career path will probably fall into itself”. These observations echoed Tina’s, who refers to building “their resources... to manage themselves better and have better outcomes”.

4.4 Theme 2- Supports for the role of the Youthreach guidance practitioner

This second theme discusses the professional links and supports relevant to the guidance practitioner’s role in Youthreach, through two sub-themes:

1. Internal support from management and staff.
2. External supports for both student and guidance practitioners.

4.4.1 *Internal Supports from management and staff*

A key issue regarding the professional role of the guidance practitioner is how the work is valued and the level of internal support provided to it. Tina and Jane affirmed that in their centres, “counselling has always been valued by management”, with Tina adding that sufficient time has been allocated for it. While Tom felt “trusted” and “supported” by staff, which was important to him. He added they were lucky to have another teacher, who is also a qualified guidance counsellor, thus enabling them to:

feed the guidance philosophy across the centre... whether it is a Maths class or ...sitting down working out where you are going for work experience...there is a guidance piece to all of that.

(Tom)

However, Angela voiced concerns relating to the increased paperwork and accountability, and shared a student's comment that Youthreach was becoming more like mainstream school when it is supposed to be a second chance at education. Additionally, she gets frustrated as she does not believe that:

Management fully understand or appreciate what we do. We now come under SOLAS, it is a business now and it is about numbers, grades and folders. They don't look behind the numbers, they just want to know how many are progressing and that is it.

(Angela)

Angela also perceived that, "often more weight is given to the key worker"..., "who often has zero training", and only when something goes wrong is she called upon and, "treasured for a while as they know I can do it". Another issue for her is her part time status, as are many of her colleagues; therefore, she rarely meets them even at meetings and this "is not all that helpful".

In contrast, both Liz and Sue feel supported by management, as their co-ordinators value the advocacy service. However, for Sue, the perception from some staff is that "it is an easier or softer option", as if you are not in the classroom teaching, then you are not really doing a whole lot". While Liz felt that having a separate office base to do administration work away from the Youthreach centre where she is employed, means that she "didn't get dragged into staff politics" and was viewed as "more of an independent support coming in".

4.4.2 External supports for both students and guidance practitioners

Firstly, with regard to the external supports available for the students, there are a variety of professional links reported by the interviewees, which include outside agencies, schools, colleges and for a few, student's families. All of the practitioners engage with outside agencies concerning the students at varying levels. Tina has a lot of autonomy and engages with all of the relevant agencies pertinent to the needs of the centre. They include the Health Services Executive (HSE) related services e.g.: family doctor, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, (CAMHS), Department of Social Protection, Social (DSP), Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and Social Workers. Similarly, Tom is the point of contact with outside agencies in his centre. In contrast, Angela and Jane have minimal input as for the most part as it is the role of the Youthreach centre co-ordinator to liaise with outside agencies and student's families.

Both Sue and Liz, as advocates, link in from a supportive role where necessary. For example, if the student has an appointment with any of the outside agencies they sometimes accompany them, especially if it is the first appointment. Sue and Liz do not make the initial referrals to NEPS or CAMHS as it is the role of the centre co-ordinator in conjunction with the therapeutic counsellor. Only Sue and Tom have direct links with post primary schools, where they both emphasised the importance of having a named member of staff that they engage with. For the other participants the link is through the Youthreach centre co-ordinator. All of the guidance practitioners have links with their local FE colleges to support student progression.

Finally, contact with parents who engage with the centres occurred mostly through the Youthreach co-ordinator. Tina only contacts parents when the student is present so that he/she hears the conversation to prevent misinformation or confusion.

The second type of external support relates to support for the guidance practitioners themselves. A key issue that arose in the findings is the practitioners' own self-care to deal with the many challenges of the role. Due to the complex nature of the role, the four guidance counsellors avail of the five two hour sessions of supervision which is funded by the DES throughout the year. For Tina "self-care was essential" as the students' lives are "chaotic" and "many have profound difficulties going on, and lack of support".

Some of the guidance counsellors attend the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) branch meetings, but as Tom noted they are very "secondary school focussed...it hurts my head". Jane has links with other guidance counsellors who are more adult guidance focussed. The researcher was very surprised that there was no forum specifically for Youthreach practitioners to meet up and when this question was asked of the participants, they all reflected on it, and Angela "thought it would be a good idea to meet up".

In contrast, the two Youthreach advocates do not have the same type of external supervision support for their role. They are part of an advocate network and have quarterly meetings otherwise, as Liz pointed out:

You can feel a bit isolated in the role because you are just coming in on your own...that is where I see the benefits of the regional meetings.

(Liz)

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings from the six interviews with Youthreach practitioners. It highlighted the data analysis strategy, in addition to two major themes that emerged from the data. The findings presented here will be discussed in the context of the literature in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion Chapter

5.0 Introduction

The aim of the discussion chapter is to critically interpret and synthesise the primary findings with the literature in Chapter two. It will discuss the predominant themes that emerged in the research findings.

5.1 Research Findings Overview

This study was guided by a number of research questions to explore the issue of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach from the perspective of guidance practitioners. Although this research is a small-scale study, it provides a snapshot in time of six guidance practitioners' experiences of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach, in both urban and rural settings. The primary research question asked "*How is guidance counselling currently provided to students in Youthreach?*" The secondary research questions sought to find out: *What is involved in the role of the guidance practitioner in Youthreach? What type of guidance activities are offered to Youthreach students? What are the current guidance counselling needs of the students in Youthreach?*

In terms of the overall findings, firstly, the nature of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach includes supports such as guidance, counselling and psychological interventions, advocacy and mentoring as an integral part of the educational and vocational services provided by Youthreach (Gordon, 2007). The four guidance counsellors interviewed in this study, are employed to deliver all aspects of guidance counselling, similar to the post-primary integrated model of personal and social, educational and career guidance (DES, 2005; IGC, 2008; NCGE, 1996). The vocational and career aspect of the role of the guidance counsellor and the advocate overlaps in some Youthreach centres. However, according to the two advocates interviewed in this study, where the role differs is that advocates' only offer one-to-one support, sometimes including personal support, although for more serious issues where appropriate, they refer on (Gordon, 2007).

Secondly, as the needs of the students in Youthreach have become more complex over the years (Byrne & Smyth, 2010; European Commission, 2013; Gordon, 2009; Ryan, 1998; Stokes, 2016), a certain type of provision, the SENI model, has been put in place to support Youthreach centres to manage such issues (Gordon, 2007, 2009). However, while this addresses the needs of some of the students, it does not extend to all Youthreach centres.

Students attending one of the 20 SENI centres, which receive extra funding appear to be experiencing positive outcomes (Gordon, 2009, 2013), and students who do not attend one of the centres are at a particular disadvantage (McHugh, 2014).

Thirdly, another concern that emerged in the findings is the support for onward progression for Youthreach students as they transition on from Youthreach on completion of the programme. For some students this may be a difficult experience, and the participants in this study find that a common problem is students dropping out of FET courses. The literature indicates that across Europe a lack of support for guidance counselling for ESL is common (OECD, 2014). Furthermore, evidence highlights the importance of career guidance especially at times of transitions in education (Gracey & Kelly, 2010; Hughes and Borbély Pecze, 2012; OECD, 2010). To address these issues and tackle the challenges facing ESL including attrition from education courses, bridging programmes have been introduced in several European countries (Hughes and Borbély Pecze, 2012). These programmes also deliver targeted counselling supports to students experiencing complex issues and mental health problems (Bachke, 2016). Several of the participants in this study articulated the need for a link or bridging programme in their Youthreach centre, as a means to support their students in breaking the cycle of dropping out of education.

Finally, the findings suggest that there is no professional forum exclusively for guidance practitioners in Youthreach to meet and share best practice. The guidance counsellors have access to IGC membership and its branch meetings, while the advocates have access to an advocacy network that meet quarterly.

The findings will be discussed under the two key themes that emerged in the study:

1. The Nature of Guidance Counselling Provision in Youthreach
2. The Guidance Counselling needs of the Youthreach Student

5.2 The Nature of Guidance Counselling Provision in Youthreach

This theme will discuss the findings on the nature of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach. The FET sector includes engaging students in guidance counselling and information services “incorporating learning options, career options, employment and progression options in the context of matching the right person to the right opportunity” (DES, 2013, p.112).

This section will be divided into two sub-themes: the role of the guidance counsellor and

advocate in Youthreach and guidance counselling activities in Youthreach.

5.2.1 The role of the guidance counsellor and advocate in Youthreach

In post-primary schools, the guidance counsellor must be a qualified teacher with appropriate guidance qualifications (DES, 2012). The role of the guidance counsellor is clearly of central importance in post primary schools and includes one-to-one and group guidance counselling (DES, 2009). Youthreach comes under the umbrella of FET, and two different professionals, the guidance counsellor and/or an advocate, provide forms of guidance to students, with both similarities and differences in their role and activities with the students.

As part of the commitment to tackling ESL, policy highlights the central role of the guidance counsellor to combat this issue (EU, 2015). Furthermore, in the context of ESL and disadvantage the role of the guidance counsellor is to address educational disadvantage and social inclusion (Sultana, 2014). The OECD envisaged guidance as a tool to help overcome, barriers to learning, disability, class, social and work (OECD, 2004). Evidence from studies in both Europe and Ireland has found that it is mostly students from lower socio-economic groups who fail to succeed in the education system (Barnardos, 2009; Boldt et al., 1998; Byrne & Smyth, 2010; Lynch, 1999; Dale, 2010). Additionally, the National Guidance Forum (NGF) conducted research in 2007 and one of the discrepancies they identified was the lack of guidance support for ESL (Gordon, 2009). Therefore, appropriate support is vital for ESL students, who may not have the same home supports to prevent them from dropping out of education altogether (Byrne & Smyth, 2010; Gordon, 2009; Kearney, 2014; Stokes, 2003; McHugh, 2014). This is consistent with the findings in this study, as the characteristics relating to dysfunctional families, social issues, disadvantage and lack of parental support were common to both rural and urban Youthreach settings. Additionally, two of the guidance practitioners in this study commented how they strived to be the one good adult in student lives (Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012).

Another key issue regarding guidance counselling provision in Youthreach is that of the professional qualifications and competencies for the role. The FET Strategy states that for the purpose of learning, students engaging with the services will have access to high quality career guidance counselling (DES, 2013). Furthermore, since 1998, it has been recommended that a qualified guidance practitioner is available to support all Youthreach

students (DES, 1998; Friel & Coulter 2004; Ryan, 1998). This is consistent with the literature that emphasises the value of high quality career guidance (DES, 2015; European Commission, 2013; NCGE, 2004). In the primary findings of this study, one of the participants expressed concerns about colleagues' professionalism in relation to guidance activities, mainly due to a lack of training around professional boundaries. Similar issues regarding boundaries were also identified in previous research (Friel & Coulter, 2004). While this was not highlighted by all the participants, it does raise the issue of appropriate training for staff in Youthreach centres, especially considering the needs and vulnerability of the students.

The similar responses that all the participants interviewed had in common was their passion and belief in their role in helping and supporting these students, despite the complex nature of the work. Therefore, the need to engage in self-care was deemed important to the role, with all four guidance counsellors attending supervision as part of their professional responsibility (IGC, 2012, 2016). The importance of supervision is demonstrated by the fact that the DES fund five two hour sessions of supervision throughout the year (IGC, 2012). With regards to the guidance counsellors in this study, the importance of supervision as part of their self-care was evident. On the other hand, this is different for the advocates in Youthreach who generally do not receive professional supervision. They rely on peer support, i.e. other advocates, whom they meet throughout the year through regional and national meetings. Although, there is an exception if they are part a SENI centre, where the staff are entitled to receive supervision and supports, as it is central to the model (Gordon, 2009, 2013).

The findings also indicate that there is no professional forum for Youthreach guidance practitioners to formally meet and share practice, although there appeared to be the intention to set up an informal network at some point (Gordon, 2007). Even though the guidance counsellors in this study acknowledged that they are members of their local IGC branch, they felt these meetings were primarily secondary school focussed. Therefore, going forward this should be a consideration to enable guidance practitioners in Youthreach to discuss common issues and support each other, as they are dealing with comparable students. The researcher is aware that advocates cannot attend IGC meetings as they are not qualified guidance counsellors, however thought should be given for some sort of forum to be established as highlighted by Gordon (2007) previously.

5.2.2 Guidance counselling activities in Youthreach

In this study each Youthreach centre is unique in its delivery of guidance services and the guidance activities varied greatly. This had no bearings on location but was influenced by management support, as some practitioners had more autonomy to carry out their role. In one centre there was a lack of understanding about the role of the guidance counsellor by management. Another issue that was identified is the valuing of guidance provision in Youthreach. For example, one practitioner in this study, articulated concerns about the level of respect for guidance provision in Youthreach, as the perception that ‘buying in’ counselling support indicates an ad-hoc approach to delivery. This is dependent on management’s perception of guidance, rather than considering the overall critical role of guidance counselling in Youthreach. This is at variance with the FET strategy (SOLAS, 2014) which promotes the opportunity to access high quality career guidance. While the European Lifelong Guidance Report (ELGPN) highlights the need to tailor guidance support to effectively meet the needs of young people (Borbély-Pecze & Hutchinson, 2013).

The findings from the guidance counsellor’s interviewed suggest that while they are involved in vocational and career guidance in Youthreach, which include visits to career events, FE college open days, CAO applications, and work experience their role is mainly focussed on personal counselling, as one guidance counsellor interviewed pointed out that there is so much going on in the students personal lives that need to be addressed first. This is in contrast to several of the guidance counsellors’ experience of the role in post primary school, where the focus is more vocational and careers orientated.

With regards to the role of the advocate in Youthreach, the findings suggest that they are more involved in frontline guidance where the focus is on managing the students’ career options and choices, information gathering on jobs and training, curriculum vitae (CV) preparation and practice for interview and work experience. The role of the advocates in this study is vocational guidance on a one-to-one basis, building relationships, information giving, vocational preparation, work experience preparation and planning, college visits, applying for college grants in addition to some level of personal supports, while referring more complex personal issues to other professionals. This concurs with FET policy where the advocates’ role is articulated as vocational to support decision-making, progression and placement (SOLAS, 2014). Furthermore, as attested in this study, the role may involve

accompanying students to appointments with outside services. This has to be treated sensitively so as not to disempower the student.

5.3 The Guidance Counselling Needs of the Youthreach Student

This theme will discuss the guidance counselling needs of the Youthreach student. It will be divided into two sub-themes; personal, social, educational and vocational needs and funding of guidance provision in Youthreach.

5.3.1 Personal, social, educational and vocational needs

A key area of research over the years has concentrated on the specific needs of the Youthreach students who are outside the mainstream education sector (Gordon, 2004, 2009, 2013, 2017; Ryan, 1998; Stokes, 2016). Generally, the characteristics and needs are very similar across centres; they are all effectively early school leavers (ESL) and have higher than average mental health issues in comparison to students in mainstream education (Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Gordon, 2009). Evidence from the findings from this study indicate issues such as anxiety, bullying and depression relating to social media and gaming, and have contributed to young people's feelings of diminished self-worth and poor mental health. The advocates in this study reflected that a reason for this may be that in the early days of Youthreach there was limited awareness about counselling and mentoring compared to now. In dealing with such challenging concerns, professional training for staff is paramount as many students have come from dysfunctional backgrounds (Gordon, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2017; McHugh, 2014). However, this is not just a national problem, but European-wide, with preventative schemes being put in place to combat this issue. A Norwegian preventative scheme supporting ESL's experiencing complex issues, such as mental health and social problems, with counselling and support is an example of a successful initiative (Bachke, 2016).

A theoretical lens that could be used to understand the complex lives of Youthreach students and their environment is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979). This model focuses on the quality and context of a young persons' environment and how any conflict or change in one context can affect both positively and negatively other areas (Boyd and Bee, 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rosa and Tudge, 2013). The findings in this study indicate how family, school and community can impact negatively on the young person's development. Negative experiences that resulted in the young people dropping out of mainstream

education include dysfunctional behaviour, economic and educational disadvantage, poor family relationships, neglect, and unfavourable school experiences with teachers and peers. These complexities and negative relationships are classic high risk ecology factors (Jamal et al., 2013).

Several of the guidance practitioners in this current study indicated that this was often their parents and families experience of education, with two of the practitioners experiencing whole families coming through the Youthreach system (Gordon, 2007). This correlates with the literature on the topic of perpetuating the cycle of ESL and barriers to participation and progression with disadvantaged young people and communities (Dale, 2010; DES, 2008; Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Gordon, 2013; Stokes, 2003). Additionally, in Ireland the role of parents in education is enshrined in legislation and fixed in education policy and school decision making, with a range of measures in place to involve parents in school life (EU, 2015). The funding that the student may have had in mainstream does not necessarily transfer with them to Youthreach. Not like their peers in mainstream, who may have similar needs but have access to both qualified guidance practitioners and the services of NEPS, NEWB and NCSE (DES, 2010).

One of the unique elements of Youthreach is its student centred approach and the nature of relationships between staff and students, compared to mainstream education where many students leave due to negative experiences (Byrne & Smyth, 2010; DES, 2010; Eurydice & CEDEFOP, 2013; Gordon, 2009, 2017; Kearney, 2014; McHugh, 2014; OECD, 2012; Stokes 2003). Research suggests that meeting these needs necessitates the environment to be a supportive one, where positive relationships with staff exist to support the students' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012; Hamman & Hendricks, 2005; Talbott and Cushing, 2011). This led to the development of the SENI programme in 2007 which uses Erikson's (1959) model of human development and is based on secondary attachment theory. Moreover, it also relates to Bowlby's (1990) theory of attachment as students who feel comfortable and secure with staff may be willing to focus on educational possibilities. This correlates with the conception of using mentoring in Youthreach, as it fosters good relationships, allowing the young person to experience success in their lives which in turn can open up possibilities for the future (Brendtro and Ness, 1983; Gordon, 2009, 2013; Kearney, 2014). Three of the participants in this current study who use the mentoring programme stressed that these relationships must be focussed around the students, built on trust, respectful and authentic. Conversely, a poor match in the

student mentor relationship can have a negative impact on the actual mentoring process (McHugh, 2014).

In line with European policy, one key measure to stem the drop-out of young people from education and training has been the creation of ‘bridging programmes’, which has proved successful in some European countries (Hughes and Borbély-Pecze, 2012). The researcher is aware that these programmes already exist in some Youthreach centres that formerly existed under FÁS (now SOLAS), where they offer programmes to support learners into entry level employment or further training (SOLAS, 2014). However, findings from this research indicate the need to formalise and offer these bridging programmes to include all ETB run Youthreach centres, as this was an identified gap in education provision by the guidance practitioners in this study. Currently, one of the advocates has created a bridging programme to support their student needs, and offers support on career planning, work experience and personal development as they move out of the Youthreach programme into further education, training or employment. While another guidance counsellor was establishing her version of a bridging programme with a select few students in the coming year. This is significant, as it demonstrates the necessity for a formalised programme of continued support to students to alleviate attrition and promote effective progression pathways for Youthreach students (DES, 2010).

The primary findings demonstrate that there is an “emotional investment” in education that requires the unique skills of developing and nurturing young people as “teaching is a caring profession and care work is endemic to education” (Lynch et al., 2012, p.84). However, as one practitioner in this study stressed, there is a concern that Youthreach is more about number crunching now rather than the students behind these numbers. This reflects the view that education is becoming more of a business and market-led enterprise, and a measureable commodity based on performance and outcomes (Lynch et al., 2012). Yet, this does not suit some young people, who get lost in the system and drop out of school. Youthreach has an important role in the Irish education system, as it is holistic in nature, student-centred, and delivered in a caring environment to support early school leavers in overcoming the negative experiences they have encountered in the mainstream education system, while also being acknowledged as a viable alternative option to mainstream education (DES, 2008, 2010; Gordon, 2017).

5.3.2 Funding of guidance provision in Youthreach

Allied to the issue of addressing the complex needs of students in Youthreach is the provision of adequate funding to ensure this is realised. In the secondary education system, guidance counselling allocation is based on the number of enrolled students and the school type, e.g. DEIS status (DES, 2018). In Youthreach, there is no specific guidance allocation but centres are allocated funding in their budget to buy in specific guidance counselling and psychological services according to the needs and number in each centre (DES, 2013; NCGE, 2013). Evidence from past research indicates that the most common use of this fund is for counselling services that can include, a counsellor, psychotherapist or counselling psychologist (Gordon, 2013). In the findings from the current study, the use of the funding varied between the centres with one centre using it on the services of external counsellors to 'normalise' counselling. In another it was used for therapeutic services. While in the two advocates centres, the funding was used for outside counselling services. Whereas for a small number of Youthreach centres (i.e. those in the SENI), the funding model is more generous and is determined by the number of students and can be used for staffing, training, professional care supervision and staff supports (Gordon, 2013).

Furthermore, this research highlights the absence of preventative services which are available in post primary schools, but not Youthreach, due to the student-teacher ratio in mainstream education (DES, 2010). These services include NEPS, NEWB and NCSE (Gordon, 2017). The DES Inspectorate in their evaluation of Youthreach report recommend that links with these agencies should be formalised in Youthreach, for the benefit of both students and staff, due to the high numbers of students presenting with learning disabilities and behavioural issues (DES, 2010). This would also support the Council of the European Union's (2015) view that states all young people are entitled to have equal access to an inclusive education that meets their needs.

In this study, three of the participants considered their guidance provision adequate to meet the needs of the students. Conversely, the other three participants perceived their guidance provision as inadequate, citing more time, training and supports were necessary to be able to accommodate the growing complex needs of students. Youthreach was initially established as a response to combat ESL and associated social and educational disadvantage (Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Griffin, 2016; Dale, 2010; Stokes, 2016). While the numbers of ESL are decreasing (DES, 2013; Gordon 2017), barriers still exist and need to be revisited

in order to overcome this issue and find a solution. There is still a need for Youthreach, as the model is consistent with international best practice (O'Connor, 2010), and is a place to address youth unemployment, where a key priority is the recognition of non-formal learning (Hughes & Borbély-Pecze, 2012).

The role of guidance in the FET sector is ultimately about matching the right person to the right job (DES, 2013; SOLAS, 2014). However, this is in conflict with recent research by Gordon (2017) who considers that due to the rise in students presenting with complex needs, the focus should be on the students' emotional and social development. Additionally, she advocates training and supports for staff to equip them with the professional skills necessary to deal with the presenting needs of the students (Gordon, 2017). Furthermore, the national SENI roll-out ought to be revisited, as the disparity between Youthreach centres exist, as do the complex needs of the students and the evidence suggests that those students unable to access these services are being disenfranchised (Gordon, 2017). This is supported by the findings of this study where one of the advocates was part of the SENI, which entitled her centre access to three days counselling support and training. Conversely, the other advocate was not part of the SENI, and therefore only had access to the counselling services for one day a week in line with the centre budget, and was not enough to meet the needs of the students. Although Gordon (2013) has pointed out that while the SENI is expensive it fits with the European model of promoting fairness, as it recognises and meets different educational needs (OECD, 2012). Therefore, greater consideration needs to be given to the mainstreaming of the SENI model across all Youthreach centres to ensure equitable provision to all Youthreach students.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has critically discussed the overall primary findings in relation to the literature. Two major themes emerged from the research and a number of key issues were revealed. Chapter six presents the overall conclusions and recommendations from the research study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

This final chapter presents an overview of the findings within the context of the research aim and objectives of this study. In addition, the strengths and limitations are addressed, and a number of recommendations for policy, practice and future research in this area will be presented. In conclusion, a reflexive summary is presented from the researcher's experience of undertaking the research study.

6.1 Overview of Aim and Objectives of Research Study

The overall aim of the research study was to explore the provision of guidance counselling to Youthreach students. This research study gathered the experiences and perceptions of both guidance counsellors and advocates working in a number of Youthreach centres, in both urban and rural settings. It provides findings on current practice and an understanding of the opportunities and challenges that exist in the delivery of guidance services in Youthreach. A number of the key issues emerged in the findings.

A central issue is the nature of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach. The findings indicate that in Youthreach, guidance is delivered by both guidance counsellors and advocates and while the delivery of the vocational aspect of the roles may overlap, they differ in the delivery of personal counselling as the role of the guidance counsellor includes the delivery of all of the elements of guidance: personal and social, educational and vocational guidance. In contrast, the role of the advocate, which is funded by SOLAS, is to support the students in their decision-making and progression and is instrumental in organising and monitoring students on work experience (SOLAS, 2014). From the findings advocates, refer students on to the counselling services through the centre manager and this support is acquired through the funding allowance from the centre budget's which allows for visiting counselling services (DES, 2013).

The importance of the role of guidance in addressing issues around progression and transition for Youthreach students is highlighted in this study. Good practise incorporates a student focussed approach, tailored to the individual needs of the young person (Council of the European Union, 2008; Oomen and Plant, 2014). However, recent research suggests that Youthreach students need to be understood in a wider context than just progression into further education and employment (Gordon, 2017). A stronger emphasis on supporting

student emotional and social development, combined with access to the appropriate services available to their peers in mainstream education is advocated (Gordon, 2017). The SENI programme was introduced to combat the complex needs of the students presenting in Youthreach, however, it is currently only available in twenty centres around the country. The sentiment from a number of guidance practitioners in this study suggests that there is a disparity in the supports offered. The support services such as NEPS, NEWB and NCSE available to mainstream post primary schools are not available to Youthreach, unless they are part of the SENI programme.

Another issue that arose was the attitude to guidance counselling provision from Youthreach management. The findings indicate that the majority of the participants felt supported in their role by management with varying amounts of autonomy to carry out their role. However, for one guidance practitioner she perceived the attitude as very challenging, as it was her experience that the centre manager did not understand or appreciate the nature of the guidance counsellor role. The centre has a visiting therapeutic counsellor who does not consult with the guidance counsellor to discuss the students, this all goes through the manager who does not involve or share information from these meetings with the guidance counsellor, which is difficult for this practitioner as she is only there for a limited number of hours a week.

The issue of professional competencies of staff working in Youthreach also arose. The literature highlights the need for training for staff to support good practice, increase professionalism and clarify boundaries, as these are necessary when working with and responding appropriately to Youthreach students with complex needs (Gordon, 2009, 2013, 2017). However, the findings indicate that this is not always the case with one guidance practitioner raising concerns about staff competencies as they lack specific training and do not understand the boundaries related to confidentiality and sharing of sensitive information about students.

Finally, the issue of professional supports for guidance practitioners in Youthreach also arose in this study. It is apparent that there is a difference between the supports availed of by guidance counsellors and advocates. The findings indicate guidance counsellors in Youthreach can avail of IGC supervision, as well as attend IGC branch meetings (DES, 2016; IGC, 2012). However, the advocates do not have access to professional supervision,

but do have a peer support network available to them in the form of regional and national meetings.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of Study

This section will outline both the strengths and the limitations of this research study.

6.2.1 Strengths

A key strength of this study is the interpretivist approach used to examine the topic as it afforded a space where the Youthreach practitioners were able to disclose what is real for them and share their lived experiences with the researcher (Smyth and Hattam, 2001; Stead et al., 2012; Thomas, 2013). The small sample size allowed the researcher to draw out thick descriptions from the insights and experiences of the individual interviewees (Bryman, 2012; Thomas, 2013). Another key strength is the fact that this is an under-researched area of guidance counselling practice in the FET sector where the provision of guidance counselling by different staff in Youthreach can be ad-hoc and confused.

6.2.2 Limitations

The qualitative research approach is often criticised as the responses to semi-structured interviews are open to interpretation if the researcher adopts a subjective, rather than an objective, stance (Bell, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011). Due to the sample size, the findings do not afford a platform for larger conclusions (Thomas, 2013). However, while this approach may not offer a comprehensive view, the authenticity of the data was ensured by concentrating on the depth of the responses from the guidance practitioners interviewed (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, as a consequence of the time constraints of the project the researcher did not get the perspectives of the students or other staff working in Youthreach. Hence, there is scope for a larger scale study that incorporates a range of perspectives.

6.3 Recommendations

Arising from the overall findings of this research study, the following recommendations for policy, practice and research are offered:

1. National and European policy has allowed for measures to be implemented to support ESL, and Youthreach students are considered ESL. It is recommended that a review of successful practices in other EU countries to inform future services here

in Ireland to take into account the rise in mental health issues, similar to the successful Norwegian initiative, to address this issue (Bachke, 2016).

2. A wider debate on guidance counselling provision in Youthreach is needed to address the needs of this group of the students who are of similar age to their post primary peers (Gordon, 2017). It is evident that Youthreach students require access to the same support services available to post primary students (e.g. NEPS) to further address their individual needs.
3. It is recommended to revisit the SENI roll out and supports to all centres as the outcomes of this initiative were proven to be positive (Gordon, 2013).
4. It is recommended to establish greater links nationally with guidance practitioners in Youthreach to include both guidance counsellors and advocates.
5. A further recommendation is that guidance is delivered in Youthreach by qualified guidance counsellors who are allocated appropriate time and resources to fulfil their role. This would also dispel the notion that guidance is optional and dependant on managements' view of the role of guidance in Youthreach centres.
6. Due to the nature of the guidance role in Youthreach, regular professional supervision and self-care is necessary for all guidance practitioners, including advocates, to prevent burn out.
7. It is recommended that further research from a longitudinal perspective, be conducted nationally on guidance counselling provision to Youthreach students that includes more Youthreach centres and the various stakeholders involved.

6.4 Reflexivity in Relation to Personal Learning

Reflexivity is concerned with being aware of how our own experiences, thoughts and emotions inform us throughout the research process (Etherington, 2004). Throughout this study, a reflexive approach was employed and supported by means of regular supervision with the research supervisor, in addition to an accredited external personal counsellor. The researcher was mindful that as a teacher in a Youthreach centre, her own experience and issues of subjective bias could influence the research, and for that reason monitored closely her reactions and interactions throughout the research process (Berger, 2015; Cohen et al., 2011). Additionally, during the early stages of the research, the researcher was concerned about the number of practitioners who would volunteer their time and energy to participate

in this study, and had a specific duty of care towards them. As the Youthreach sector is small, the researcher was mindful that the issue of confidentiality is a major priority.

As a new guidance counsellor, recognising the importance of self-care and supervision is part of the guidance role (Bimrose and Hearne, 2012). This is especially important in the context of working in Youthreach and was voiced by all four guidance counsellors in this study due to the challenging issues that the environment presents. This is echoed by the IGC who advocate the need for guidance counsellors to pay careful attention to their wellbeing by engaging in self-care (IGC, 2016). This study has demonstrated to the researcher that self-care is essential to avoid emotional burnout, especially if going forward, the researcher finds themselves working in the Youthreach services as a guidance counsellor, due to the demanding nature of the role.

Finally, the researcher appreciates this research experience and gained an insight into the role of the guidance practitioner in Youthreach. She is grateful for the opportunity that this new learning can bring to her own future career as a guidance practitioner. At the outset of the study the researcher assumed that all Youthreach centres had a guidance counsellor on staff. However, this research has clearly dispelled this assumption as there are varying levels of provision based on factors that include; funding, allocation of resources, location and the attitude of management towards the provision of guidance counselling.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the main findings of the research study. It has also identified the strengths and limitations and outlined a number of recommendations to inform future policy, practice and research. Finally, an insight into the personal learning of the researcher during the research process was discussed.

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Appendix A
Subject Information Letter (Volunteer)



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Subject Information Letter (Volunteer)

Date:

EHS REC no. 2018_03_2015

Research Title: An exploration of guidance counselling provision in the Youthreach programme.

Dear Guidance Counsellor/ Advocate

I am a student of the MA in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development programme in the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr Lucy Hearne. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of guidance counselling provision in Youthreach centres. In order to gather information on the topic I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face to face audio taped interview. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and be held in a confidential location agreeable to you. If a face-to-face interview is inconvenient arrangements can be also made for a telephone or Skype interview.

The particular benefits of the study will be that it will identify current provision of guidance counselling in Youthreach which can inform policy makers, Youthreach providers and the guidance profession about the needs of students and practitioners in Youthreach. All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be stored on a password-protected computer and destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines.

Every effort will be made to minimise risks to volunteers in this study. Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. 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 your name and the name and location of your Centre will not be used in the reporting of the research.

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

Researcher:
Rosina Kelly Joy

Email address: 16101928@studentmail.ul.ie

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Lucy Hearne

Telephone number: 061 202 931

Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Thanking you in advance for considering this request. Please contact me by (insert date) to arrange an interview date and time.

Yours sincerely,

Rosina Kelly Joy,
Researcher.

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (**EHSREC 2018_03_2015**). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

EHS Faculty Office

University of Limerick

Tel (061) 234101

ehsresearchethics@ul.ie

Appendix B
Consent Form (Volunteer)



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Consent Form (Volunteer)

EHS REC no. 2018_03_2015

An exploration of guidance counselling provision in the Youthreach programme.

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

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C Interview Framework



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Research Title: An exploration of guidance counselling provision in the Youthreach programme.

Interview Framework (Semi-Structured)

Background

1. Tell me about your professional role in Youthreach? Why did you decide to work in Youthreach? Have you worked in any other educational settings?
2. Are you qualified as a guidance counsellor (or an advocate)? Have you always work in this area?

Centre Information

3. Can you describe your Youthreach centre? Student numbers? Programmes?
4. Tell me about the characteristics of the students on the programmes and the needs that they are presenting with? Do you believe these needs have changed over the years?
5. Tell me about the progression of the students' after completing a course? Do you track the students when they leave? Employment? PLC course? Solas?
6. What is the dropout rate of students attending and the strategies used for retention?
7. How does guidance fit into the curriculum? Junior Cert? Leaving Cert? Leaving Cert Applied? Wellbeing?

Professional Role

8. Tell me about your role in the centre, the type of specific guidance activities you provide, and your engagement with students? How often do you meet the students, for career guidance? personal counselling? 1-1? group?
9. Tell me about the guidance counselling approaches/techniques you use in your work.
10. How is your role perceived by other staff members in the Centre? Do you feel supported and valued in your role by other staff members?
11. Describe the outside agencies who interact with the centre? E.g. NEPS/ Adult guidance/ Addiction services/ Probation services/Welfare/Social services/ Other?
12. Tell me about any links with schools or colleges in the area or links with the students' family?
13. How do you link in with other guidance counsellors in the region?
14. Describe the positive and challenging aspects of your role in Youthreach? What would you like to do more of, and what do you not like about the role?
15. How do you deal with crisis issues if they arise in the Centre? Are they regular occurrences? Is there a centre procedure for such events?
16. What kind of supports and supervision do you avail of to look after yourself in the role?
17. Do you believe that the provision of guidance counselling in your centre is adequate for the needs of the students?
18. From your experience what advice would you give a new practitioner starting out as a guidance counsellor who might be working in the Youthreach service?
19. Is there anything you would like to add as we come to the end of the interview?

Appendix D

Email Approval from EHS Ethics Review Committee

From: Anne.O'Brien
Sent: 29 March 2018 10:18
To: Lucy.Hearne
Subject: 2018_03_15_EHS

Dear Lucy

Thank you for your amended Research Ethics application which was recently reviewed by the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

The recommendation of the Committee is outlined below:

Project Title: 2018_03_15_EHS An exploration of guidance counselling provision in the Youthreach programme.

Principal Investigator: Lucy Hearne

Other Investigators: Rosina Kelly Joy

Recommendation: Approved until October 2018.

Please note that as Principal Investigator of this project you are required to submit a Research Completion Report Form (attached) on completion of this research study.

Yours Sincerely

Anne O'Brien

Anne O'Brien, Senior Administrator, Education & Health Sciences

Research Ethics Committee

Ollscoil Luimnigh / University of Limerick

Guthán / Phone +353 61 234101

Facs / Fax +353 61 202561

Ríomhphost / Email: anne.obrien@ul.ie Gréasán / Web: <http://www.ehs.ul.ie>

Appendix E

Extract from Interview

Interviewer: Tell me about the characteristics of the students on the programmes and the needs that they are presenting with? Do you believe these needs have changed over the years?

Interviewee: They have all dropped out of mainstream education. They all have that in common and I suppose when you really look at it, no student drops out of mainstream, there is always a reason for that to happen. As long as I have been meeting students individually I have never found an exception to that. There is always a significant reason why they drop out of mainstream education. If they are getting on OK in mainstream they stay there, and then there is a whole load of factors that feed into the cause of it. A lot of it is outside of themselves, chaotic families, alcohol, anxiety, depression in the families as well, no structure in their lives things we take for normal not happening, routines going to bed eating regular meals all that basic care. It would be neglect mostly evident with them, and they have a lot of disruptive behaviour themselves as well, but a lot of it is more the environment they came out of.

Interviewer: Do you think the needs have changed over the years or are they similar?

Interviewee: Generally I would say the trend is similar but probably now there is the social media. The phones have impacted and everything is so immediate and the whole thing about privacy and the effect of them not be able to put in place boundaries to mind themselves from you know sharing their information and getting the bully back then when they would be exposing themselves to this.

Interviewer: Would that happen in the centre or is that what they coming in with?

Interviewee: In and out of the centre

Interviewer: Tell me about the progression of the students' after completing a course? Are they tracked or where do they go?

Interviewee: They're not really tracked as such. Here, if they do the LCA they have the guidance module, they would have the career plan. After they finish the Leaving Cert they can come back in September if they need any assistance, that's open to them alright. But they are not tracked long-term.

Interviewer: Do most of them when they leave go on to PLC courses? or do they go to another course or they go to employment?

Interviewee: There is a mixture, I know the employment opportunities have improved now, than over the last number of years when there wasn't any. But generally Youthreach students are better at practical skills, they all say they don't like sitting down they like to be active. Some would do Post Leaving Cert courses and some would go to do a pre-apprenticeship course and some because of the work experience which is a huge part of the course which prepares them for work as it gives them an idea of what to expect for an interview as well.

Appendix F

Transcript Excerpt for Analysis

Interviewer: That leads me nicely into the next question describe the positive and challenging aspects of your role in Youthreach?

Interviewee: I suppose the fact that it is part time, but equally I would say the same as my mainstream job. Managements' perception of my role. Everyone wants to own a piece of every child but overall who has responsibility? It's like when everybody is supporting every child and we all do in our own way, all class teachers and the soft skills stuff that happens all the time, but with so many people involved with every child I just want to know - who has the overview? Everybody got bits of information and it is not all pooled centrally and I find that really challenging. If I want to get a picture of a person coming in - I wouldn't get the full picture from anybody and you would get different things from different people but nobody seems to have it all. So I do what I can in the moment - that is all you can do and that is how I manage it, when I am there I do what I can. All the structural things I cannot change so I work with in the constraints that I can.

The positives are the kids are amazing, building a relationship with them and providing a safe space for them to talk.

Interviewer: You mentioned supervision, what kind of supports and supervision do you avail of to look after yourself in the role?

Interviewee: I go to supervision, all that is provided- 5 sessions a year that is what is provided by the government. It is group and it is really good.

