An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

By
Donna Curran
Student Number: 17115914

Research Supervisor: Mr. Tom Geary

Thesis submitted to U.L. for the award of Master of Arts in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development

Submitted to the University of Limerick, 4th October 2019
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 ____________________________

Donna Curran
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. Firstly, I would like to sincerely thank my research supervisor, Mr. Tom Geary, for his advice, encouragement and guidance during this research. I also want to express my gratitude to Tom for his continuous support throughout the Masters Programme.

I would like to thank Dr. Lucy Hearne, Siobhan Keogh and all of the lecturers involved in the School of Education, for their enthusiasm and support.

A special thank you to the Principal, Guidance Counsellors and students of the participant school, who enlightened the research and facilitated this study.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude and appreciation to my friends and fellow students in the University of Limerick. I will cherish the memories of the time spent with you all and thank you for the humour, fun and encouragement.

I would like to extend a special thank you to my mom for her unwavering support, encouragement, advice, and patience. In addition, a special thanks to my sister whose strength, positivity and resilience inspires me every day.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my nephew, Daithí Dominick, who died 31st July 2019.

A little angel that passed away,
Often leaves feathers just to say,
I’ll help you, watch you, be your guide,
I’ll be with you, always, by your side.
# Table of Contents

List of Appendices ................................................................................................. vi
List of Figures ......................................................................................................... vii
List of Tables ........................................................................................................... vii
Glossary of Terms .................................................................................................... viii
Abstract ..................................................................................................................... x

Chapter 1: Introduction ............................................................................................. 1
  1.0 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Background and Justification of the Research Topic ........................................ 1
  1.2 Positionality of the Researcher ........................................................................ 2
  1.3 Research Aim and Objectives ......................................................................... 3
  1.4 Secondary Research Questions ....................................................................... 3
  1.5 Research Methodology .................................................................................... 4
  1.6 Plan of Thesis .................................................................................................. 4
  1.7 Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 5

Chapter 2: Literature Review ..................................................................................... 6
  2.0 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 6
  2.1 Policy and Practice of Guidance Counselling in Irish Post-Primary Schools ....... 6
    2.1.1 Background to Guidance at Second Level ............................................... 6
    2.1.2 Definition of Guidance Counselling ......................................................... 8
    2.1.3 Whole School Approach to Guidance ....................................................... 9
  2.2 Senior Cycle Programmes in the Irish Post Primary Sector .......................... 10
    2.2.1 Options available at senior cycle .............................................................. 10
    2.2.2 Role of the Guidance Counsellor in supporting Subject Choice ............... 12
  2.3 Career Decision-Making .................................................................................. 14
    2.3.1 Decision-Making during Adolescence ....................................................... 14
    2.3.2 Career as a Matching Process .................................................................. 16
    2.3.3 Career as a Developmental Process .......................................................... 17
    2.3.4 Career as Self-Efficacy Theory .................................................................. 18
  2.4 Psychometrics in Guidance Counselling and in particular, Career Interest Inventories ............................................................................................................. 19
    2.4.1 Interest Assessments .................................................................................. 19
    2.4.2 ICT and its use in Career Guidance ............................................................ 21
  2.5 Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 22
Chapter 3: Methodology ........................................................................................................23

3.0 Introduction................................................................................................................23

3.1 Identification of Research Question ......................................................................23

3.1.1 Primary Research Question ..............................................................................23

3.1.2 Secondary Research Questions ........................................................................23

3.1.3 Research Aim and Objectives ...........................................................................24

3.2 Research Methodology ............................................................................................24

3.2.1 Research Paradigms ..........................................................................................25

3.2.2 The Positivist Approach to Research ...............................................................25

3.2.3 The Interpretivist Approach to Research ........................................................25

3.3 Method of Data Collection and Analysis .................................................................26

3.3.1 Accessing the Sample .......................................................................................26

3.3.2 Focus Groups – Strengths and Limitations .........................................................27

3.3.3 Design of Focus Group .....................................................................................28

3.3.4 Interviews – Advantages and Disadvantages ...................................................29

3.3.5 Design of Interview ..........................................................................................31

3.3.6 Qualitative Data Analysis ..................................................................................31

3.4 Validity and Reliability .............................................................................................32

3.4.1 Validity ..............................................................................................................33

3.4.2 Reliability ..........................................................................................................33

3.5 Reflexivity ..................................................................................................................34

3.6 Ethical Issues ............................................................................................................34

3.7 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................36

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings ............................................................................37

4.0 Introduction................................................................................................................37

4.1 Demographic Information .......................................................................................37

4.2 Data Analysis Strategy .............................................................................................37

4.3 The importance and value of Transition Year ........................................................39

4.3.1 Value of Work Experience .................................................................................39

4.3.2 Subject Choice ....................................................................................................40

4.3.3 Maturation ..........................................................................................................42

4.4 Personal and Career Interests ..................................................................................43

4.4.1 Expectation on Developing Interests into Careers ............................................43
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>The Value of Career Interest-Profilers</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.1</td>
<td>Detection of Pattern in the Interest-Profilers</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.2</td>
<td>Evaluation of Interests Changing over Time</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Career Exploration and Decision-Making</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1</td>
<td>Preparation of Career Decision-Making</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.2</td>
<td>Influences of Career Decision-Making</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.2.1</td>
<td>Working with People</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.2.2</td>
<td>Labour Market Information</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5:</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Overview of Research Findings</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The Value of Transition Year</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Personal and Career Interests</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>The Value of Career Interest Profilers</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Career Exploration and Decision-Making</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>Ethical Considerations in the use of Psychometric Assessment</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6:</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Strengths and Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.2</td>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Reflexivity in relation to Personal Learning</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References | 71   |
Appendices | 90   |
**List of Appendices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>School Principal Information letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>School Principal Consent Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Volunteer Information Sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Volunteer Consent Form (Career Interest Test)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>Volunteer Consent Form (Focus Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>Volunteer Consent Form (One-to-one interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>Confidentiality Agreement for Focus Group Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H</td>
<td>Parent/Carer/Guardian Information Letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I</td>
<td>Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form (Career Interest Test)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix J</td>
<td>Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form (Focus Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix K</td>
<td>Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form (One-to-one interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix L</td>
<td>Gatekeeper Information Letter Careers Portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix M</td>
<td>Topic Guide for Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix N</td>
<td>Questions for Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix O</td>
<td>Acceptance of the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix P</td>
<td>Questions asked in Careers Interest Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix Q</td>
<td>Ethical Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix R</td>
<td>Additional Ethical Approval to include Interview Schedule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 4.1  Emerging themes relating to Career Decision-Making

List of Tables

Table 3.1  Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews
# Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASTI</td>
<td>Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CASVE</td>
<td>Communications, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, Execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDI</td>
<td>Career Development Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDEFOP</td>
<td>European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIP</td>
<td>Cognitive Information Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPIP</td>
<td>CareersPortal Interest-Profiler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>Department of Education (1921 – 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Skills (2010 – present)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an Additional Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESRI</td>
<td>Economic and Social Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communications Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGC</td>
<td>Institute of Guidance Counsellors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>Intelligence Quotient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISSU</td>
<td>Irish Second Level Students Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCA</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate Applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCE</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate Established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCVP</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCGE</td>
<td>National Centre for Guidance in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGF</td>
<td>National Guidance Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCT</td>
<td>Personal Career Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Post Leaving Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI</td>
<td>Psychological Society of Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIASEC</td>
<td>Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCCT</td>
<td>Social Cognitive Career Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Education Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPHE</td>
<td>Social Personal Health Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TY</td>
<td>Transition Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSA</td>
<td>Whole School Approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

As student’s progress through their post-primary education, they have several choices to make in terms of subject choice and the career direction they hope to take. These decisions that are made are very often closely related to a person’s interests. The overall aim of this research study was to investigate the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year students, in the decision-making process for career exploration.

An interpretivist paradigm was employed in this study. The data was gathered during a structured focus group with 8 participants from a cohort of students that had completed the online CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP). This was followed by 5 semi-structured one-to-one interviews, from the same cohort of focus group participants. The overarching themes that emerged were 1) The Importance and Value of Transition Year, 2) Personal and Career Interests, 3) The Value of Career Interest Profilers and 4) Career Exploration and Decision-Making.

The overall findings demonstrated that participants found value in using the Career Interest Profiler in career exploration in advance of subject choice, but that it should be followed up with a one-to-one guidance interview (Everitt et al. 2018, Nyles 2011).

This research study concludes by recommending the use of the CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) with students with caution, and to ensure adequate time is given in one-to-one guidance sessions to discuss the topic of interests and the results of the CPIP.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction
This chapter will outline the context of the research study while presenting a justification for the research along with the aims and objectives of the study. In addition, the positionality of the researcher is described, as well as the research methodology applied in the study. Finally, a plan of the thesis will be outlined in the concluding section of this chapter.

1.1 Background and Justification of the Research Topic
This study aims to investigate the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year students, in the decision-making process for career exploration. The decision to focus on Transition Year students was related to an interest that the researcher had in the topic of decision-making, subject choice and career direction and how they closely relate to a person’s interests. Working with Transition Year participants that had completed a Careers Learning Programme afforded the researcher the opportunity to conduct a qualitative study, with the aim of gaining an insight into what participants think and how their ideas form (Thomas 2017).

Guidance counselling in Irish post primary schools is considered a holistic practice, incorporating three areas; personal development, educational guidance and career guidance (DES 2005a). It exposes students to a broad selection of learning experiences that support them in developing skills to make effective decisions about their lives (DES 2005b). The role of the guidance counsellor, as outlined by the IGC (2017), is to support the client in making personal choices throughout the lifespan, and in doing so, assist individuals with the career decision-making process. The guidance counsellor will facilitate the “identification and integration of personal characteristics, current values, strengths and skills in the exploration of personal, educational or occupational goals” (IGC 2017, p23).

The use of interest inventories as assessment tools are very useful for Irish guidance counsellors in the integrated model of guidance counselling (Fitzgerald and Farrell 2014). Murphy and Davidshofer (2005) discuss how these types of tests have the potential to support individuals to make educational plans and develop their careers. Kidd (2006) discusses the use of psychometric tests in career counselling to assist in career development, development of skills
in decision-making and in exploring occupational interests. Administration of a career interest instrument can afford students the opportunity to gain an individual understanding of their personal interests and traits, which can result in them making more informed choices when entering senior cycle in post primary school (Grimes et al. 2017). The results can also provide a starting point in career counselling or a point to focus on if the student is confused or blocked in the area of career choice (Sharf 2013).

The various assessment instruments used by guidance counsellors in Irish post primary schools are outlined in the DES circular 0035/2017 and are intended to be used as a “guide for schools” (DES 2017b, p.1). The list is not exhaustive and the circular states that other assessment instruments may be used if deemed appropriate. The CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) is listed on the circular as a Guidance Resource (DES 2017b, p.22) and is considered appropriate to use with both adolescents and adults as a means of measuring the relative strengths of a person’s interests (Career Interests n.d).

1.2 Positionality of the Researcher

Thomas (2017, p.111) highlights the importance within interpretivist research in the researcher using their own interests and understandings to help interpret the views of participants; thus, being a “participant in the research situation”. In doing this, it is imperative for the researcher to understand their positionality, and how it may affect interpretation of data and findings, accepting subjectivity (Thomas 2017).

The researcher is a trainee guidance counsellor and a post primary school teacher of Science, Biology and Agricultural Science. The researcher has a specific interest in the various factors that influence post-primary students career decisions, with particular focus on their interests and the value that they place on their interests determining their future careers. Gaining a better understanding of the needs of students at this point in their academic careers will inform the researcher’s future career guidance practice and the use of various psychometric assessment instruments. The format of this study allowed the student voice to be heard and expressed, and the researcher enjoyed engaging in the discussions with students. The researcher had several roles throughout the research process including class teacher, trainee guidance counsellor and
researcher. The researcher accepted their subjectivity and aimed to use it to enrich the findings. However, reflexivity was carefully considered to maintain validity in the study (Creswell 2013).

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this research project was to investigate the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year students, in the decision-making process for career exploration.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Review current literature relevant to Irish post primary education, policy and practice of guidance counselling, and the main options available to students entering senior cycle.
2. Explore the factors that influence career decision-making including the use of psychometric instruments in career exploration.
3. Use qualitative methods to collect data and capture the voice of students in relation to their interests and career exploration.
4. Discuss the findings and identify recommendations of good practice with regard to the use of Career Interest Inventories in the delivery of post primary guidance.

1.4 Secondary Research Questions

1. Do students in Transition Year see the exploration of career interests as being valuable?
2. What expectations do students in Transition Year place on their current interests in shaping their future careers?
3. What interventions do Transition Year students find most useful when making their subject choice decision?
4. What are the implications for Guidance Counsellors using Career Interest Instruments with students?
1.5 Research Methodology
A qualitative approach underpins this study as it aims to explore the value that students place on using a Career Interest Instrument in career exploration and decision-making. It is a creative form of research, where the researcher can create the space for research participants to have their voices heard (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). The data was gathered during a structured focus group (Kreuger and Casey 2015), followed by semi-structured one-to-one interviews to allow for greater scope in probing participants in response to questions (Thomas 2017).

1.6 Plan of Thesis
The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: The first chapter introduces the research study. It depicts the context within which the research came about and highlights a justification for the study. This chapter outlines research aims and objectives, the positionality of the researcher, and the methodology employed in the research. Finally, a plan of the thesis is presented.

Chapter 2: A contextual background to the study is presented through relevant literature. A critical review of four main areas are discussed:

1. Policy and practice of guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools.
2. Senior cycle programmes in the Irish post-primary sector.
3. Career decision-making.
4. Psychometrics in guidance counselling and in particular career interest inventories.

Chapter 3: The research design is presented in the methodology chapter. The research paradigm, methods of data collection and analysis, and sampling of participants are discussed. Issues of reflexivity, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations related to the study are also presented.

Chapter 4: The data analysis and findings chapter presents the analytical approach used and the main findings of the research are highlighted through various themes.
Chapter 5: The discussion presents a critical explanation of the findings in the context of the literature review outlined in chapter 2.

Chapter 6: The concluding chapter summarises the main findings of the research study. It examines the extent to which the research has achieved the initial aim and objectives. The strengths and limitations of the study are highlighted, along with implications for practice and the researcher’s personal learning. Recommendations are made for further research policy and practice.

1.7 Conclusion
This chapter has provided an outline of the main features of the research study. It introduced the research topic and highlighted the researcher’s positionality in relation to the topic. The aims, objectives, secondary research questions and plan of the thesis were presented. The following chapter will outline and review relevant literature to the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to critically evaluate some of the literature relevant to the career exploration process of students in post primary school. I will discuss the policy and practice of guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools in section 1. Section 2 will highlight the options available for students entering senior cycle in the Irish Post Primary Sector. The third section discusses the career decision-making process and includes relevant theories. The final section will discuss the use of psychometric instruments in evaluating interests and career exploration as well as the use of ICT in guidance.

2.1 Policy and Practice of Guidance Counselling in Irish Post-Primary Schools

2.1.1 Background to Guidance at Second Level

Guidance counselling was formally introduced to Irish schools by the Department of Education in 1966 in response to a decrease in emigration and an increase in the range of careers available for young people (Shiel and Lewis 1993). The service was provided at a relatively high level up until 1983 (McCoy et al. 2006). Throughout this time, a guidance counsellor could be appointed on an ex-quota basis, in addition to regular teaching staff, in schools with more than 250 pupils. This provision was then raised to 500 students in 1983. In 1991, schools with a pupil enrolment of between 350 – 499 were allocated an ex-quota basis of 0.5 of a wholetime post for Guidance (Government of Ireland 1991, Shiel and Lewis 1993, McCoy et al. 2006). The Department of Education’s (DE) Green Paper on Education (1992) highlighted the holistic approach of guidance counselling in Irish schools. The Green Paper noted that Guidance in schools incorporates any activity within a school that is “aimed at helping students to achieve an understanding of themselves and their potential” (DE 1992, p. 107). Coolahan (1994) emphasised the need for greater emphasis on educational guidance in both junior and senior cycle in the Report of the National Education Convention. In their review of Career Guidance policies in 2002, the OECD made several recommendations to strengthen the guidance services that already existed in schools including finding a greater balance between the time spent on Guidance activities at both junior and senior level. The guidance counsellor allocation system
was increased to include all schools (NGF 2007) and remained in place until the reallocation of guidance hours in Budget 2012 (DES 2012), when the allocation of guidance was drawn from the overall teaching staff allocation of a school. In Budget 2017, provision was made to restore two thirds of the posts that had been withdrawn from schools in 2012 (DES 2017). The allocation of guidance counselling resources within the Irish post primary system has been retracted and expanded in accordance with the economic situation and educational policy landscape (Hearne et al. 2016b, Hearne et al. 2018). The Department of Education reconfirmed their commitment to ensuring the priority of high-quality career guidance in preparation for people in work and life, through the facilitation of an independent review of career guidance tools and provision in 2018 (Indecon 2019).

The provision of guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools is a legal requirement under section 9c of The Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998). This act places the responsibility of providing guidance to students on individual schools. It states that:

A recognised school shall provide education to students which is appropriate to their abilities and needs, and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, it shall use its available resources to – c) ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.

(Government of Ireland 1998, p.13)

The value of guidance and counselling in Ireland is widely recognised in both Government policy statements and by national bodies. The National Guidance Forum Report (2007, p.2) acknowledge Guidance in Ireland as fundamental to “lifelong learning that supports the development of human potential, social inclusion, employability and economic prosperity”.

The National Development Plan (2000) identified guidance services in schools as being vital for students to gain the greatest benefit from the education system (DES 2005b). However, the term ‘appropriate guidance’ as used in the Education Act (1998) caused limitations in the delivery of guidance in the Irish post-primary system (McCoy et al. 2006, Hearne et al. 2016b). The OECD (2002, p.9) stated that there is no clear definition of ‘appropriate guidance’, but that it should include “access by all students to assistance with their career decision making and development”.

7
2.1.2 Definition of Guidance Counselling

There are several definitions that can be drawn on when discussing guidance counselling. Many emphasise the decision making and career aspect for students. At the European level, the OECD states that

Career Guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their career.

(OECD 2004, p. 19)

The definition of guidance proposed by the Department of Education and Science refers to:

A range of learning experiences that assist students to develop self-management skills that will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. Guidance encompasses the three separate, but interlinked, areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance.

(DES 2005a, p.1)

Sultana (2008) describes guidance as a lifelong process that can produce both personal and social outcomes for individuals. It can help citizens to manage transitions between education, training and work (Sultana 2008). The National Guidance Forum Report (NGF 2007) outlines the various recommendations made by the OECD for improving guidance services in Ireland. Some of these recommendations include providing a better balance of services in schools and having a more integrated and coordinated approach to the access of careers information. The National Guidance Forum (NGF) was developed to investigate how people could access guidance across the lifespan. Its agreed definition of guidance is:

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

(NGF 2007, p.6)
Additionally, guidance counselling emphasises counselling as an important component of the guidance programme (DES 2005b). Counselling empowers students by encouraging them to explore their inner thoughts so that they develop decision-making and problem-solving skills as well as coping strategies, while also addressing behavioural issues and resolving difficulties that they may be experiencing (DES 2005b, Hearne et al. 2016b).

2.1.3 Whole School Approach to Guidance

The Green Paper on Education emphasised that while guidance counsellors have a pivotal role to play in helping students gain an understanding of themselves and their potential, including their ability to make “satisfying and fulfilling educational and career choices” (DE 1992, p. 107), the overall provision of guidance should be seen as a collaborative, school-wide responsibility to include management and administration, the guidance counsellor and subject teachers. In a study conducted on principals’ perceptions of the role of the guidance service in schools, McKenna et al. (1997) found that many principals considered that they had a lack of understanding and knowledge of the role of the guidance counsellor. A whole school approach (WSA) to guidance counselling is considered best practice (NCGE 1996, DES 2005a, DES 2009, DES 2012) with the guidance counsellor at the centre of the guidance programme. There should be integration of guidance activities as a strand of the core activities and daily life within a school (Watkins 1994).

The Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC 1998) recognise that some components of a guidance programme have curricular content and can be facilitated by a wide variety of staff. Collaborations with the guidance counsellor and Social Personal Health Education, Religious Education, Home Economics and Physical Education teachers can have a valuable contribution to the whole school approach to guidance (DES 2009). Smyth and Calvert (2011) identify that advice given by subject teachers make valuable contributions to students when deciding on subject choice and subject levels. However, limitations to the approach arise when guidance hours are allocated to unqualified members of staff resulting in some students not having access to the services of a qualified guidance counsellor (DES 2009). Hearne and Galvin (2014) assert the need for specially trained guidance counsellors for the effective implementation of crisis counselling as this role may be beyond the remit of regular subject teachers. Evidence suggests
that an integrated approach to guidance counselling is inconsistent across the Irish post primary sector since 2012 (IGC 2016). With a reduction in one-to-one counselling by 53.5%, there is an incapacity in meeting the personal and social needs of students (Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland [ASTI] 2013, IGC 2016).

The whole school approach to guidance counselling involves schools implementing guidance plans that outline how the school facilitates guidance as well as how individual students are supported in making decisions in their personal, social, educational and vocational areas (DES 2017, Indecon 2019). In order for the WSA model to work effectively, the roles, responsibilities and competencies of all school staff must be outlined clearly (Hearne et al. 2018). The absence of a guidance plan, along with insufficient time for staff to meet for guidance planning, result in many guidance counsellor’s working on their own to deliver the guidance service within many schools (Hearne and Galvin 2014).

The Whole School Guidance Framework emphasises an approach that facilitates guidance for all, guidance for some and guidance for a few thus providing support for students in three key areas: learning related to personal development, educational development and career development (NCGE 2017).

2.2 Senior Cycle Programmes in the Irish Post Primary Sector
This section will discuss the various senior cycle options that are available for students along with the subject choice process.

2.2.1 Options available at senior cycle
Students may participate in the Transition Year (TY) Programme, which is an optional, one-year, full-time programme aimed towards students who are 15 – 16 years of age (Smyth et al. 2004). It offers a bridge for students leaving junior cycle and entering senior cycle, providing students with an opportunity to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills that will help to prepare them “for the ever-changing demands of the adult world of work and relationships” (DES 1995, p2). TY programmes provide students with opportunities to carry out work experiences as well as subject sampling in advance of senior cycle (Smyth et al. 2004).
These two elements are major benefits of the TY programme as they provide students with a greater understanding of subject content, as well as the world of work, enabling them to make more informed decisions for Leaving Certificate (Smyth et al. 2011, ISSU 2014).

In Irish post-primary schools, most students participating in the traditional Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) will study Irish, unless they have an exemption, English and Mathematics. The LCE is the most widely taken programme. Most students who intend to pursue higher education at a third level institute will take this programme (DES 2011). There are syllabi available in more than thirty subjects, and students are required to study a minimum of five subjects, (usually seven) for examination (DES 2018, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA] 2003). Darmody and Smyth (2005) discuss that a student’s decisions and subject choice availability at senior cycle is influenced by school structures and practices. The choice of available subjects for learners may be restricted due to the resources available to an individual school, as well as the history and culture of subjects facilitated within a school (DES 2013). While there are over thirty subjects available within the LCE, the NCCA have noted that there is a need for “alternatives to traditional academic pathways” (Slattery and Hammond 2018, p.35) that are in-line with the advancements and changes taking place in society.

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) concentrates on technical subjects, organised into groups with additional link modules. There are many criteria that students must meet in order to participate in this programme. LCVP students must take a minimum of five Leaving Certificate subjects, two of which must be selected from one of the designated vocational subject groupings and they must study a modern European language. They must also study the two link modules, Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education (NCCA 2003). One of the limitations of this programme is that the choice of subjects available may be limited to the resources available to the school, as well as by tradition and culture of subjects provided in an individual school (NCCA 2003, DES 2013), however the LCVP programme is fully accepted as a basis for entry to third level (DES 2011).

For students whose needs are not being met by the Leaving Certificate Established or Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, there is an alternative two-year self-contained course, the
Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme. This practical programme prepares participants for adult and working life (DES 2011). It facilitates a more person-centred cross curricular approach than the traditional subject based structure (DES 2018). While the programme does not facilitate participants direct entry to third level, many students proceed to Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses having successfully completed the programme (DES 2011). A small number of students, 2710 students in 2018, (State Examinations Commission 2019) participated in the labour-market pre preparing curriculum.

Students will choose subjects for senior cycle based on both intrinsic, enjoyable and interesting; and extrinsic factors which may lead to further education or employment opportunities (Smyth et al. 2011). While it is recognised that one of the key reasons that students choose certain subjects at senior cycle is because they like them or have an underlying interest in them; it is also proposed that their choices must take into consideration the entry requirements for their potential future courses or careers (NCGE 2018). One of the fundamental roles of guidance counsellors is to provide clear and accurate information relating to subject choice information for students (DES 2005b). Career counselling incorporates the use of both interviews and a variety of psychometric assessments to develop a more profound insight of a student’s ability, preferences, interests, strengths, limitations and values (Kidd 2006). It is recommended that the guidance counsellor facilitates a junior guidance programme that supports “the assessment of students' aptitudes and consideration of their achievements, interests and subject choices and how these link to career paths” (DES 2005b, p.15). The use of career assessments and interest inventories can support guidance counsellors in their work in uncovering students’ interests, abilities, skills, values and motivations that will help them construct their future career paths (Harrington and Long 2013). Evidence suggests there has been a lack of guidance provision to junior cycle students since the budget cuts of 2012 (Hearne et al. 2016b). The highest level of satisfaction about subject choice when entering senior cycle occurs if students consult their guidance counsellor who are trained to give the correct advice (DES 2009).

2.2.2 Role of the Guidance Counsellor in supporting Subject Choice

Guidance counsellors working in post primary education in Ireland have specialist training and therefore, a formal and a professional role in three areas of guidance: personal, educational and
vocational guidance (NCGE 2004). Students are making decisions in senior cycle of post primary school which can have long-term implications for their future (DES 2009). The guidance counsellor can assist students in making these difficult decisions with activities including counselling, psychometric assessment of students, information assistance and advice, facilitating classroom based educational development programmes as well as social and personal programmes (NCGE 2004). Moreover, the NCGE (2004) suggest that the role of the guidance counsellor should also include support to school staff and parents.

Career options of students are often influenced and moulded by the subjects chosen in post primary school (McCoy et al. 2014). Students make subject choice decisions at two stages in post primary school, in 1st year and again entering senior cycle. Concern was raised that junior cycle students in a small number of schools were not given adequate opportunity to make informed subject choices when entering senior cycle (DES 2009). Recommendations were made to facilitate more guidance opportunities in junior cycle, including students’ earlier consideration of career options as well as a taught module, in addition to Social Personal Health Education (SPHE), covering career topics in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year (DES 2009). The OECD (2010) also conveyed concern over an imbalance of guidance practice in various schools and found that in many post primary schools, guidance counsellors do not make enough use of current labour market information.

A key role of the guidance counsellor is in giving information (NCGE 2004). It is imperative that students in junior cycle, and their parents, are assisted in understanding the consequences of choices and subject levels taken in terms of further study and possible career options available to them in the future (DES 2005b). Students that enter the Transition Year Programme are often allowed to sample a broad range of subjects which are available at senior cycle, which helps with the decision of subject choice. They also participate in work experience programmes. Guidance in the Transition Year Programme should give students opportunities to acquire and develop competences in educational and career exploration (DES 1995). These integrated learning opportunities can potentially support students in establishing a close link between education and employment (McGuinness et al. 2012). The Looking at Guidance report (DES 2009) found best practice at senior cycle is for all students to be facilitated with timetabled
guidance classes to help facilitate decision-making as well as participating in organised career events. Concerns with senior cycle guidance were highlighted in the ESRI report (McCoy et al. 2006), which suggested that while some students were satisfied with guidance provision at senior cycle, they were dissatisfied with the information made available to them in preparation for subject choice.

There is no official curriculum for guidance counselling in the Irish education system (Connor and Hearne 2014), resulting in guidance counsellors formulating their own curricula to meet the needs of the school (IGC 2008, NCGE 2004). McCoy et al. (2006) suggest that due to the lack of standardised formal framework for guidance, the role of the guidance counsellor varies in nature in different schools, resulting in inconsistencies in content delivered to students, as well as guidance provision. The NCCA (2007) put forward a framework to offer an outline of curricular experiences in the areas of personal guidance, educational guidance and career development to provide learners with a range of learning experiences in a developmental sequence. This framework was met with some criticism from the IGC (2008), whom while welcoming the curricular ideas and acknowledging the potential of it being a valuable resource, highlight the lack of distinction between the service elements and the curricular elements of the school guidance and counselling programme.

2.3 Career Decision-Making
This section concentrates on the literature surrounding decision-making process and career theories that underpins the work of the post primary guidance counsellor working with adolescents.

2.3.1 Decision-Making during Adolescence
Kidd (2006, p. 48) outlines that effective decision-making involves “developing an awareness of career-related opportunities and a sense of identity as an individual”, while being appreciative of the relationship between the two. To successfully build this awareness, one must understand how their emotions can influence their decisions. Good decision-making requires recognising the advantages and disadvantages of alternative choices, gauging the likely outcomes of a choice, reflecting and evaluating on the choice in terms of whether it reached the required goals.
and finally learning from poor decisions or mistakes to make improved future decisions (Berk 2014). Adolescents are less effective decision makers than adults, and as a result, less often evaluate the alternative choices (Jacobs & Klaczynski, 2002 in Berk 2014). The holistic nature of the guidance service in Irish post-primary schools integrates personal, educational and vocational guidance with the aim of ensuring students can “manage their own educational, training, occupational, personal, social and life choices” (DES 2005b, p. 5).

Having an understanding of the many decision-making styles or profiles, will allow guidance counsellors to become more tolerant of the indecision amongst students, and employ interventions that best match the individual needs of the student (Gati et al. 2010). Gati and Levin (2014) suggest that career indecision is one of the principal reasons for people to go to a career counsellor. Many young adults find it challenging and feel incapable of adequately combining the information about oneself with the various relevant career options (Phillips and Jome 2005).

The assessment of a student’s career decision-making difficulties will be the first step in moving towards helping them to improve their career decision-making. Hirschi and Lage’s (2007) sequential six-phase model of career decision-making can be utilised by guidance counsellors as a fast and simple way to evaluate what phase of the career decision-making process a student is in. Students can then be supported to make their first career choice and guided along the various phases of the model to increase their career choice readiness. The CASVE (Communication, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, Execution) cycle (Sampson et al. 1999) model is one approach that can be utilised by guidance counsellors to support students to solve problems and make decisions. This model can be used alongside the cognitive information processing (CIP) approach (Sampson et al. 2004), which uses an assessment for readiness for career decision-making (Sampson 2018). The CIP differentiated service delivery model is recognised for use by Guidance Counsellors in the delivery of whole school guidance services for junior cycle services. High readiness students can use self-help services, moderate readiness students receive brief guidance assisted services while low readiness individuals received one-to-one case-managed guidance (Sampson 2018).
Barnes et al. (2011) recognises that while young people can and should make their own choices, they are strongly influenced by their parents, carers and families. Parents can have a “supportive, aspirational and encouraging effect” (Barnes et al. 2011, p. 123) which inspires a more holistic approach to their son or daughter’s career decision-making. Parents have been recognised as being highly influential in the career decision-making process of adolescents (NCGE 2004, McCoy et al. 2014). However, Irving (2000) in Barnes et al. (2011) highlights that parents may be limited by their life experiences and socio-economic circumstances, and as a result may need support to ensure that their influences are positive.

2.3.2 Career as a Matching Process
In 1909, Frank Parson developed a person-environment fit career development theory that described three factors for people making career choices: that individuals should have a clear understanding of themselves; they should have a knowledge of the requirements and conditions for attainment of success in different lines of work; and that it should be possible to draw relationships between the individual and the occupation (Sharf 2013). The successful use of this theory requires reliable and valid data about both the individual and the occupation, which is gathered in the form of aptitude and interest tests, as well as analysis of skill requirements of occupations (Kidd, 2006).

The person-environment fit theory (1959) was expanded by Holland in the 1960s and 1970s (Kidd, 2006). Holland suggests that most people have a Personal Career Theory (PCT) which is a “collection of beliefs, ideas, assumptions and knowledge” (Reardon and Lenz 1999, p.2) that gives direction to individuals in their choice of career or study. He suggests that people search for occupations that are congruent with their interests, contributing to an individual’s satisfaction, performance and persistence in their occupation (Hartung et al. 2015). Holland emphasises the practical application of the theory (1997). He places people and their occupations into one of six interest categories – Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional, known as RIASEC (Reardon and Lenz 1999). Many career counsellors use Holland’s model to facilitate matching an individual’s interests with environment, however there are also limitations to the approach. The model could be affected by education, age, gender, social class, and intelligence (Holland 1997). Kidd (2006) argues
that the model does not consider the fit between abilities and the demands of work. It is worthwhile for guidance counsellors to bear in mind that as students grow and mature, their interests and environments and possible abilities may also change (Kidd 2006).

2.3.3 Career as a Developmental Process

Developmental theories of career decision were welcomed in the education system in the 1960s as models that supported the development of student’s career maturity, self-awareness and decision-making capacity. Psychologists took a wider approach, using the term career development, implying that an individual will be involved in a long-term process of career decision-making (Tolbert 1974). Assessment instruments are used to help clients with their self-understanding, as opposed to the traditional person-environment fit approach which provided an evaluation of the client (Kidd 2006).

Ginzberg et al. (1951) established the first career development theory that included childhood. Ginzberg proposed that the process of occupational choice would develop over a number of years (Patton and McMahon 2014) to conclude in early adulthood. Ginzberg observed that an individual’s interests play a major role in their selection and rejection of careers from early childhood (Trice et al. 1995). The original theory included a fantasy stage, to be followed by a tentative stage (Patton and McMahon 2014). He later amended the developmental theory to acknowledge that occupational choice and decision-making would occur across the lifespan (Ginzberg 1972). Ginzberg revised the theory to take into account reality factors, thus bridging the person-environment fit theories, developmental stage theories and contextual theories, and in turn recognising the important role that family and environment can have on an individual’s career development (Patton and McMahon 2014). Ginzberg (1984) refers to occupational choice as

a lifelong process of decision making for those who seek major satisfactions from their work. This leads them to reassess repeatedly how they can improve the fit between their changing career goals and the realities of the world of work.

(Ginzberg 1984, p. 180)
Super’s Developmental theory of Vocational Choice (1957) focuses on an individual developing a realistic self-concept, and gradually aiming to apply the self-concept to an occupation. The theory identifies that individuals pass through five life stages (Barnes et al. 2011) including growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and disengagement. Super portrayed the movement through the life stages or “minicycles” (Hartung et al. 2015, p.102) as a linear process through which people will move through regardless of whether their life stage was addressed. The Exploration stage, which comprises of action and reflection, is the stage at which adolescents are considered to be (14 – 24 years) (Patton and McMahon 2014). Super’s theory recognises the emergence of various values and goal setting in late adolescence, which can be taken into consideration when making career decisions, but also highlighted that an individual’s values will develop at different times for different people (Sharf 2013). While Super’s career development theory has been praised for standing the test of time (Borgen 1991, in Brown et al. 1996), it has some limitations. Barnes et al. (2011) criticise the theory as it places people in particular categories, as exceptions will always be present. Super’s theory fails to consider the maturity of the individual and that age may not necessarily determine an individual’s capacity to make good career decisions (Kidd 2006).

2.3.4 Career as Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-Efficacy theory was developed by Bandura (1986) as a behavioural psychology concept which focuses on the strengths of an individual’s beliefs to accomplish a behaviour successfully (Sharf 2013). Bandura refers to self-efficacy as

people’s judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses.

(Bandura 1986, p 94)

Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994, 2000) expanded on the concept of self-efficacy as a behavioural trait into a detailed career theory referred to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Sharf 2013). SCCT emphasises certain cognitive mediators which influence career decision-making behaviour such as self-efficacy, outcome expectation and personal goals (Patton and McMahon 2015), and how these factors interact with the person or their environment, such as gender,
ethnicity, the nature and quality of educational opportunities, social supports and barriers (Lent et al. 2000). The SCCT theory maintains that self-efficacy has an important role in career development, helping to determine an individual’s educational and vocational interests, choices and successes (Hartung et al. 2015).

Research suggests that low self-efficacy expectations result in the avoidance of studying certain academic subjects and related careers (Betz 2004). While many students that career guidance counsellors work with will have a strong self-efficacy (Betz 2000), some will have a low self-efficacy. The self-efficacy theory and related interventions are recommended as important tools for guidance counsellors, as a means of increasing perceived self-efficacy and career options (Betz 2004). However, there are psychometric limitations to the use and application of the theory (Luzzo 1996). Lent and Hackett (1987) identified the need to produce psychometrically sound measures of career self-efficacy, in order to assess an individual’s confidence and ability to engage in career decision-making.

2.4 Psychometrics in Guidance Counselling and in particular, Career Interest Inventories
This section will critically examine the literature on the use of psychometric interventions in guidance counselling, with a focus on interest assessments. It will also consider the increasing use of ICT in guidance.

Psychometric testing is a branch of psychology that aims to measure personal characteristics, individual differences and psychological variables (Murphy and Davidshofer, 2005). Psychometric tests are used to understand and predict human behaviour (Fitzgerald and Farrell 2014) and result in decisions being made about an individual (Coaley 2010). Thousands of psychological assessments exist, ranging from personality inventories to IQ tests, ability and attainment tests to interest assessments (Murphy and Davidshofer, 2005).

2.4.1 Interest Assessments
Guidance counselling in Irish post primary schools is considered a holistic practice (DES, 2005a). It exposes students to a range of learning experiences that assist them in developing
skills to make effective decisions about their lives. One of the principal activities in providing students with appropriate guidance is providing students with “objective assessments of their aptitudes and achievements and feedback on these assessments” (DES, 2005b, p. 9).

Interest assessments with a psychometric basis are deployed by guidance counsellors in Irish post-primary schools (Fitzgerald and Farrell 2014). Vocational interests play a major role in the determinant of career choice (Low et al. 2005). Murphy and Davidshofer (2014) discuss the potential that interest assessments have in supporting an individual to make educational plans and develop their careers. They can assist in the development of decision-making skills while assisting in identifying occupational fields which a person is likely to enjoy working in (Kidd 2006) and therefore will have higher performance and satisfaction levels (Tracey 2010a). Sharf (2013) suggests that the results can provide a starting point in career counselling or a point to focus on if the student is confused or blocked in the area of career choice. To understand the whole person, vocational interests must be understood, and interest assessments can be useful in assisting a guidance counsellor in understanding the individual holistically (Low et al. 2005).

A limitation in the measurement of interests is that the early forms of interest assessments, such as the Strong Vocational Interest Blank (Fouad et al. 2003), were often gender biased (Sharf 2013). Fouad et al. (2003) reports the use of separate forms for men and women. The women’s form had stereotypical feminine occupations while the male form had male-oriented occupation titles such as mailman.

The use of career interest assessments can measure a student’s likes and dislikes for various types of work, assisting in the decision-making process (Fitzgerald and Farrell 2014). A strength of psychometric tests is that it is a swift and accurate way to gather systematic information which aids the decision-making process (Murphy and Davidshofer 2005). With an increase in internet access, several types of interest assessments have been adapted to use online (Tracey 2010a). Having an individual carry out an interest test online will provide immediate feedback, which can encourage the career exploration process, while organising and simplifying what can be a complex process (Gysbers et al. 2014).
The various assessment instruments used by guidance counsellors in Irish post primary schools are outlined in the DES circular 0035/2017 and are intended to be used as a “guide for schools” (DES 2017b, p.1). The list is not exhaustive and the circular states that other assessment instruments may be used if deemed appropriate. The CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) is listed on the circular as a Guidance Resource (DES 2017b, p.22) and is considered appropriate to use with both adolescents and adults as a means of measuring the relative strengths of a person’s interests (Career Interests n.d).

2.4.2 ICT and its use in Career Guidance

Information and Communications Technology is abbreviated as ICT (Brock 2015). The use of ICT within the post-primary classroom can potentially create greater opportunities for independent learning (McCoy et al. 2014). In 2004, the OECD outlined the benefits of using ICT in the delivery of guidance. At a European and International level, the use of ICT by guidance counsellors is considered an essential and foundational competency (Bimrose et al. 2010). The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [CEDEFOP] (2005) recognise that guidance counsellors require specific training in ICT, to carry out specific guidance related ICT competences for the delivery of traditional activities, in new ways. The DES (2009) reported that guidance counsellors were experiencing limited access to ICT infrastructure in the post-primary sector for teaching and learning purposes. While training and upskilling was made available to guidance counsellors in the use of ICT in guidance, the report further suggested that fewer than half of guidance counsellors were using technology as a central part of their classroom-based work (DES 2009). Further studies identified the challenge experienced by schools in obtaining sufficient funding for ICT infrastructure, resulting in the limited use of ICT by Irish students (Cosgrove et al. 2014).

Using online tools to deliver career guidance can offer several benefits to individuals, including providing them with new opportunities to access career guidance at any time from wherever they are and opening up the possibility of new forms of guidance service (Hooley et al. 2015). There are, however, limitations to the use of online tools also. Indecon (2019) highlight that lack of skills and training in ICT may negatively impact the accessibility, especially of disadvantaged users in need of guidance. Online tools should therefore be used to complement,
rather than as a substitute, for traditional career guidance activities. It is recognised that utilising ICT in guidance delivery will reduce the demand for face to face guidance support (Bimrose et al. 2015), however there are also arguments in support of maintaining the personal guidance service as individuals value face to face interactions (Bimrose et al. 2010, Vigurs et al. 2017). Vuorinen et al. (2011) discuss that while ICT can provide vast quantities of guidance related information, some young people become overwhelmed with the enormity and quantity of information available, and therefore benefit from personal guidance in support of selecting and interpreting the information. Evidence suggests that using career websites as part of broader careers learning programmes can impact positively on an individual’s career readiness (Vigurs et al. 2017), but their use must take the specific individual into account to ensure the online tool is appropriate (Indecon 2019).

2.5 Conclusion
This chapter has reviewed the literature in relation to four thematic areas; policy and practice of guidance counselling, options available for senior cycle, career decision-making and the use of psychometric instruments in evaluating interests. The following chapter outlines the methodology of the study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction
This chapter outlines the research approach and the chosen paradigm that underpinned this research investigation. Consideration is given to various research methodologies and methods. Methodologies refer to philosophies adopted by the researcher during the study (Tight 2003) while the methods include the practical tools or techniques used by the researcher in collecting and analysing data (Thomas 2017) and are informed by the underlying approach taken by the researcher. The researcher will identify both primary and secondary research questions which form the basis of this study. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss methods of data collection and analysis, access and sampling of participants. Issues of validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethical concerns will be considered.

3.1 Identification of Research Question
Research questions can provide a basis in planning and carrying out successful research projects (Robson and McCartan 2016). This is an exploratory research study, that focuses on gaining an understanding of individual perspectives, and therefore the research questions are open-ended in nature (Agee 2009).

3.1.1 Primary Research Question
All research studies should have an overarching primary research question (Miles et al. 2014). This provides a good starting point for considering the specifics of what data will need to be collected (Agee 2009). The primary research question in this study asks ‘What is the relevance of using a career interest instrument with transition year students in the decision-making process for career exploration?’

3.1.2 Secondary Research Questions
The following secondary research questions were also identified:

1. Do students in Transition Year see the exploration of career interests as being valuable?
2. **What expectations do students in Transition Year place on their current interests in shaping their future careers?**

3. **What interventions do Transition Year students find most useful when making their subject choice decision?**

4. **What are the implications for Guidance Counsellors using Career Interest Instruments with students?**

### 3.1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of the study is to investigate the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with students, in the decision-making process for career exploration. This was accomplished by meeting the following research objectives:

1. Review current literature relevant to Irish post primary education, policy and practice of guidance counselling in Irish education, and the main options available to students entering senior cycle.

2. Explore the factors that influence career decision-making including the use of psychometric instruments in career exploration.

3. Use qualitative methods to collect data and capture the voice of students in relation to their interests and career exploration.

4. Discuss the findings and identify recommendations of good practice with regard to the use of Career Interest Inventories in the delivery of post primary guidance.

### 3.2 Research Methodology

This section addresses the research methodology that underpinned this study to answer the research questions. Robson (2011) highlights the importance of the researcher’s considerations of the rationality behind their chosen research method. Having considered the objectives of this study, a qualitative approach was employed.

Research methodology refers to a range of considerations that will inform a researcher’s activities (Walliman and Buckler 2008). Khan (2008) suggests that research methodology is a plan of enquiry, which must be carried out in a proper method, taking the researcher from their underlying assumptions to research design, and data collection.
3.2.1 Research Paradigms
The term ‘paradigm’ describes the ways that we think about research and the world (Thomas 2017). Paradigms, or research programs, formulate the main beliefs on which the scientific practice of a specific discipline is oriented (Flick 2015). The term can be used to describe how we source knowledge, as well as what we intend to do with it. These paradigms are referred to as positivism and interpretivism (Thomas 2017).

3.2.2 The Positivist Approach to Research
The positivist approach to research aims to predict and explain, making generalisations from selected samples. It is based on the impression that the world can be observed, measured and analysed scientifically, with the researcher maintaining a detached and unbiased view of the issue (Walliman and Buckler 2008). It can include the use of surveys, experiments and structured observations, and can be referred to as a quantitative approach (Thomas 2017). McLeod (2011) describes quantitative research as being objective, based on statistical evidence consisting of numbers and data obtained by computational and numerical methods, with the aim of producing generalisable conclusions (Bell and Waters 2014). Positivist researchers can remain detached from the participants, by creating distance between themselves and the participants (Carson et al. 2001), thus maintaining an objective position in the research (Thomas 2017). A criticism of this approach to conducting research is the insufficient view of social reality that it takes, and its failure to consider how social reality is established and maintained by people (Blaikie 2007). Initially, the researcher considered the use of questionnaires as a form of gathering data. Cohen et al. (2018) describe the advantages of using questionnaires as being both a quick and cost-effective form of collecting large quantities of data. However, the researcher wanted the study to reflect the opinions and experiences of students, and therefore a qualitative approach was taken for the study. The researcher felt it was more beneficial to establish multiple views from participants in the study (Thomas 2017) and to allow the participants’ experiences and voice to be echoed in the findings.

3.2.3 The Interpretivist Approach to Research
With the interpretative paradigm, it is not assumed that rules and meanings are the same for all people participating in the research (Flick 2015). Interpretative paradigms are used in
qualitative research where generalisations are not made. Bryman (2012, p.116) states that qualitative research “investigates the why and how of decision-making, as compared to what, where, and when of quantitative research”. It is a creative form of research, where the researcher can create the space for research participants to have their voices heard (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). The perceptions, feelings, thoughts and actions of the research participants are observed by the researcher, while listening attentively to what the participant is saying to gain an understanding of the participant’s viewpoints (Thomas 2017). Cohen et al. (2018) highlights the lack of variables in interpretivist research, allowing the researcher to adopt a subjective rather than an objective position. Thomas (2017) posits that as the research findings are open to interpretation by the researcher, they may be susceptible to researcher bias. The researcher takes up an insider role in their own research, using their own interests and understandings to help interpret the behaviours and views of the participants (Thomas 2017).

This research focuses on the relevance of using an Online Interest Assessment tool with Transition Year students in the decision-making process of career exploration. The research explores students’ perceptions about the interventions used. With this in mind, a qualitative approach which facilitates depth of data collection, such as carrying out a focus group with follow up interviews was considered the most appropriate research method. Interviews allow for the use of open-ended questions and probing by the researcher, which can give participants the opportunity to give their own opinions, and respond in their own words, as opposed to choosing from fixed responses, facilitated by quantitative methods (Mack et al. 2005).

3.3 Method of Data Collection and Analysis

This section will discuss the methods employed in the research.

3.3.1 Accessing the Sample

When undertaking research with participants under the age of 18, informed consent must be obtained from school gatekeepers, principal, parents/carers/guardians and students (Cohen et al. 2018). To collect data, the researcher needed access to students in Transition Year. Gatekeepers play a significant role in research, as they control access, and re-access to research participants (Cohen et al. 2018). Once ethical approval was received from the University of Limerick on
the 28th March 2019 (see appendix Q), the principal, school gatekeeper, was given an information sheet and consent form (see appendices A and B). At this stage, the gatekeeper of the online CareersPortal Interest-Profiler was also given an information sheet (See appendix L) and consent to use this test was obtained. The research for this study was undertaken from March to May 2019, in the west of Ireland.

A convenience sampling strategy (Thomas 2017), was utilised due to the time constraints of this study and the ease of access and availability of participants to the researcher (Marczyk et al. 2005). Bryman (2012) further adds that a benefit of this sampling strategy is the availability of respondents may result in a good response rate.

Phase 1 of the research involved a total of 26 students in Transition Year being given an information sheet and consent form to complete the online CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (See Appendices C, D and P). Parents/carers and guardians of these students were also issued with an information sheet and consent form (See Appendices H and I). When consent forms were collected from both students and parents/guardians/carers, the students completed the online Careers Interest-Profiler during a careers class. Results were formulated automatically, and all participants held access to their own results. The researcher did not have access to these results.

Phase 2 consisted of students being invited to join a focus group. Consent forms were given to students and parents (See Appendices E and J). A structured focus group, with a list of pre-prepared questions (Kreuger and Casey 2015) (See Appendix M), was conducted with a sample of the same cohort of Transition Year students. Following the focus group, the participants were invited to take part in a semi-structured one-to-one interview with the researcher (Thomas 2017) (See Appendix N). Further consent forms were given to both students and parents/carers/guardians (See Appendices F and K).

3.3.2 Focus Groups – Strengths and Limitations

A focus groups is “a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (Powell and Single 1996, p. 499). Kreuger and Casey (2015, p.2) further define focus groups as “a carefully
planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment”. Bell and Waters (2014) describe focus groups as being either formal or informal gatherings of people who may or may not know each other, but whom do have a shared interest or experience in the research topic. Kreuger and Casey (2015) suggest having between six and eight participants in a focus group, while Powell and Single (1996) recommend having between six and ten participants, whom are all strangers to each other.

A key strength of focus groups is that they are less intimidating to many research participants, and this environment is fitting for participants to discuss ideas, opinions and experiences (Kreuger and Casey 2015). Within the focus group setting, participants are given considerable liberty in their replies and the discussion may develop into areas not intended by the researcher, which can lead to rich and interesting findings (Powell and Single 1996). The approach offers the opportunity of allowing people to probe each other’s reasons for having a certain outlook (Bryman 2012). Focus group findings can be used gain understanding on a topic and thus to advise decision-making (Kreuger and Casey 2015). The researcher chose to conduct a focus group on the basis that it can be “used to gather rich data that can enhance decision-making and provide constructive data for the development, assessment, and modification of programs” (Sagoe 2012, p.13).

A limitation of focus groups when the participants are known to each other is that the lack of anonymity may result in an atmosphere which is not completely honest of critical personal views and negative experiences (Powell and Single 1996). Khan et al. (2001) cautions that data from focus groups may only suggest plausible answers and should not be considered indicative of the attitudes or beliefs of an entire population. In contrast with the in-depth, one-to-one interview, a focus group discussion can be somewhat superficial, generating surface information on individual participants (Powell and Single 1996).

3.3.3 Design of Focus Group
The focus group was designed to be one hour duration and was held in a classroom. To facilitate this, students were asked to forgo 20 minutes of their lunch break prior to a class of 40 minute
duration. There were eight participants enlisted in the focus group. Ground rules were discussed at the beginning with the researcher emphasising confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher ensured students understood that their contributions were shared with each other and not just the researcher. Participants signed a confidentiality agreement (See Appendix G). The focus group was structured, with a list of pre-prepared questions (Kreuger and Casey 2015), (See Appendix M).

The researcher clarified that participants realised they would be audio-recorded using a dictaphone. Recording of the focus group is useful to check the wording of statements, while allowing the researcher to maintain eye contact and remain focused on the group discussion (Bell and Waters 2014). Recording and transcribing focus groups helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and allows for a more thorough examination of what people say (Bryman 2012).

3.3.4 Interviews – Advantages and Disadvantages

The one-to-one interview is an in-depth research technique that allows a researcher’s questions to be answered by a participant, enabling researchers to gather thorough attitudinal and experiential information from participants (Powell and Single 1996). The information given by the participant can be followed up with additional open-ended, exploratory questions with pertinent, gently probing sub questions to investigate underlying motives (Robson 2011). There are three basic forms of interview: structured interviews, unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews, all of which involve personal contact with the interviewee which encourages opinion-giving (Thomas 2017). The in-person experience also allows the researcher to witness non-verbal cues that may be informative to their research.
### Table 3.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structured Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uniformity across the various interviewees</td>
<td>• Pre-determined questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easy and quick administration</td>
<td>• Little scope to follow up an interesting comment from interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easily coded responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unstructured Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interviewees set the agenda</td>
<td>• Easy for the interviewee to go off topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No pre-determined format beyond general interest in the topic</td>
<td>• High degree of interpretation therefore paraphrasing, summarising and restating skills of researcher are vital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semi-structured Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interview schedule with list of issues to be covered with the flexibility of following up points as necessary</td>
<td>• Possibility of the interview losing track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Freedom in sequencing the questions</td>
<td>• Time can be difficult to manage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Thomas 2017)

Having considered the advantages and disadvantages of the three forms of interview, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, drawing up an interview schedule prior to the interview, but having the freedom to ask different questions or supplementary questions as the need arose.
3.3.5 Design of Interview
A total of five students, from the focus group cohort, participated in the one-to-one interviews, designed to enhance validity (Thomas 2017). The interview schedule (See Appendix N) was devised following analysis of the focus group data and afforded the researcher the opportunity to follow up on issues and findings that arose from the focus group. Additional ethical approval was gained from the University of Limerick on 9th May 2019 (See Appendix R). The interviews were held in the Guidance Service Office, for an approximate duration of 30 minutes during lunchtime.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher confirmed with the participants that the interviews would be audio-recorded and the terms of confidentiality and anonymity as outlined in the consent form were understood.

3.3.6 Qualitative Data Analysis
Data analysis is a vital component of all qualitative research. It involves organising and explaining the data, “making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (Cohen et al. 2007, p.461). Yin (2009) describes the process of data analysis as consisting of several stages including examining, categorising and tabulating data to address the initial goal of the research. Transcribing is a significant step in the process of data analysis, with the possibility of losing data from the original encounter (Cohen et al. 2007). Kreuger and Casey (2015) believe the researcher is best placed to prepare the transcripts. While it is a time-consuming task, it provides the researcher with the opportunity to gain in-depth experience of the data. Sagoe (2012) adds that quality of data analysis is improved if the researcher themselves carry out the transcription.

Thomas (2017) highlights the constant comparative method as an effective way of understanding and interpreting qualitative data. It involves scrutinising the data continuously, comparing each element with all other gathered data. This method can be used to make links to emerging themes that summarise the data (Braun and Clarke 2012). An advantage of the researcher using this method of data analysis was that it allowed the researcher to be more aware.
of the emerging from the focus group that could be followed up in later interviews (Bryman 2012).

Bryman (2012) labels themes as identified categories of data that relate to the research questions. Theme mapping follows the constant comparative method (Thomas 2017). This places the themes in a sequential order, substantiating each theme with a quote from the transcripts (Thomas 2017). By using theme mapping, the researcher hoped to highlight the experience of Transition Year students in the use of an online careers interest assessment in the career decision-making process. The Braun and Clarke (2012) six phase analysis framework was implemented by the researcher:

| Phase 1 | • Familiarisation with the data  
|         | • Reading, re-reading, note-taking |
| Phase 2 | • Systematic coding of data  
|         | • Encapsulates both the surface and underlying meanings of data |
| Phase 3 | • Generation of potential themes  
|         | • Examination of all data to form themes, and the relationship between the themes |
| Phase 4 | • Review of potential themes  
|         | • Themes begin to address the research question in a meaningful way |
| Phase 5 | • Defining and naming themes  
|         | • Encapsulates the essence and the story of the theme |
| Phase 6 | • Writing up the report  
|         | • Assembling, editing and further analysis of themes and data to support analytic claims |

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

While conducting any form of research, it is imperative that the method of data collection is critically examined to ensure it is reliable and valid (Bell and Waters 2014). While reliability and validity are deeply rooted in positivist research, it is also necessary to consider them within the qualitative research paradigm (Golafshani 2003). The credibility of quantitative research
depends on instrument construction, while in qualitative research, the researcher becomes the instrument. Patton (2015) highlights that in qualitative research, the researcher must be present and immersed within the data collection process, to be present and able to record any changes during/after an event. Thus implying that the credibility, and in turn reliability and validity, of qualitative research is dependent on the effort and skill of the researcher. This section will examine the validity and reliability of the research to ensure that it may be deemed trustworthy and worthwhile.

3.4.1 Validity
Validity refers to the relevance, appropriateness and trustworthiness of an instrument (Kidd 2006). The validity of a test or instrument should tell us if it measures what it is supposed to measure, if it provides credible conclusions and if the data can support and sustain the interpretation that is placed on it (Sapsford and Jupp 2006 in Bell and Waters 2014). While sorting data into categories, the researcher counted the frequency of each theme or category across the data to emphasise validity of the coding scheme (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). To maintain validity while analysing and interpreting the data, the researcher remained honest and objective throughout the process (Cohen et al. 2018). A reflective journal was kept to document and critically reflect on any issues that arose during the research project, to minimise invalidity. Creswell (2013) highlights the importance of continuously returning to the data to ensure it is correct and that accurate information is being transferred, helping to maintain validity.

3.4.2 Reliability
Reliability indicates the likelihood or capability of a test or procedure producing consistent results on all occasions (Kidd 2006). Questions that ask for opinions can produce different answers on different days, as the participant may have been influenced by an experience that affected their opinion (Bell and Waters 2014). Thomas (2017) believes that reliability in social research is irrelevant. Within qualitative research, focus groups and interviews are bound to give different results on different days, as the data is dependent on the nature of people. Interpreting the data is done on the basis of the researcher, implying that the same interview transcripts may be interpreted differently depending on the positionality of the researcher. As reliability refers to the consistency of the research method being repeatable and gaining the same
results, the reliability within this research cannot be guaranteed. It is possible that if a different researcher facilitated the focus group and interviews used in this study, that different results would arise. However, reliability was enhanced by comparing data from each of the interviews.

3.5 Reflexivity
Reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis phase is imperative and is an important consideration in qualitative research (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The reflexive process in qualitative research is an “active process of systematically developing insight into your work as a researcher to guide your future actions” (Mills and Birks 2014, p.25). The notion of reflective practice underlines the NCGE Competency Guidelines (2011). These guidelines also highlight that reflexivity is an essential skill for guidance counsellors, to enable critical thinking which will inform our actions, understandings and communications. When writing reflexively, the researcher becomes ethically and politically self-aware, becoming embedded within their own inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). As the study was a qualitative one, employing an interpretivist position, self-reflection provided the opportunity for the researcher to recognise that their relationship with the participants in the study had the potential to influence the research findings (Creswell 2013). The reflexivity process for this research project included the use of a reflective journal. All ideas, questions, thoughts and biases that the researcher had throughout the study were recorded and critically analysed to ensure the researcher’s positionality did not influence the research, allowing the researcher to offer more trustworthy and honest accounts (Denzin and Lincoln 2013).

3.6 Ethical Issues
Conducting research with appropriate ethical oversight protects both participants and researcher, while also maintaining and protecting the reputation of the university or organisation involved (George 2016). The principles that should be followed when conducting research include avoiding harming participants, ensuring the research maintains beneficence, while respecting participant’s values and decisions and treating all people equally (Flick 2015).

Ethics are principles of conduct about what is right and wrong. When applied to research, ethical principles encompass some decisions and dilemmas that do not just pit right against wrong, but
balance one right action against another right action, taking into account the possibly conflicting interests of the parties involved. What is right for me may not be right for you. What is right for the researcher may not be right for the participant.

(Thomas 2017, p. 37)

Throughout this research, the researcher complied with the code of ethics and best practice guidelines as is expected and pivotal in the work of guidance counsellors (IGC 2012, NCGE 2015 and PSI 2011).

All ethical issues identified were submitted to the University of Limerick Ethics Committee to gain ethical approval. The researcher had a duty of care to the participants involved in the research. Permission to conduct the research was gained from the gatekeeper, in this case the principal of the school (See Appendices A and B). The sample of students invited to participate did not include any students that the researcher actively taught to reduce personal biases. As this research included the online CareersPortal Interest-Profiler, which can be considered an assessment instrument, the researcher maintained best practice by strictly adhering to the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC 2012) and the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI 2011) Codes’ of Ethics.

Ethical consideration of participants in the focus group and interviews were stated in the information sheet and consent forms (See Appendices C, D, E, F, G). Information sheets clearly outlined the voluntary aspect of the study, the title of the research project and how the data would be collected and managed, allowing participants to be fully aware of the purpose of the research, in a way that did not impact their input. Participants were also informed that the guidance counsellor was available to them to follow up with any issues that may have arisen during the focus group or interviews. A letter of information and consent was also given to parents of participants (See Appendices H, I, J, K).

All individuals have a right of privacy in any research, especially with respect to the storage, processing and dissemination of data (Bell and Waters 2014). Confidentiality of the school and participants was a priority for the researcher, and was upheld by handling, storing, managing
and disposal of data in accordance with procedures set out by the University of Limerick’s Ethics Committee.

3.7 Conclusion
This chapter has outlined the primary and secondary research questions, which was followed with a discussion of the research methodology and the chosen research methods. An explanation of how access was gained to the target population and how the data was analysed was given. Issues of validity and reliability were considered while reflexivity and ethical principles and concerns were also addressed. The next chapter will analyse the findings from the focus group and interviews.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction
This chapter presents the data analysis and findings from the research, in line with the methodology outlined in the previous chapter. The findings presented are based exclusively on the data from the focus group and interviews conducted by the researcher and are represented in a blended approach. The duration of the focus group was 60 minutes and each of the five interviews were on average 30 minutes in duration. At the start of the focus group and each interview, the ground rules were reviewed, the purpose of the discussion was explained, and confidentiality and ethical considerations were outlined. The researcher followed a topic guide during the focus group (Appendix M) and an interview schedule (Appendix N) during each of the one-to-one interviews.

4.1 Demographic Information
The focus group comprised of eight Transition Year students, following completion of the online CareersPortal Interest-Profiler. Four males and four females participated in the focus group. Five additional one-to-one semi-structured interviews took place to validate the focus group findings (Thomas 2017) while also gathering further and more detailed information from participants.

4.2 Data Analysis Strategy
A transcript from the focus group and each interview was written up by the researcher, in order for the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the data (Kreuger and Casey 2015). Following transcription, the data was read several times, and analysed using the constant comparative method (Thomas 2017). This facilitated the identification of emerging themes (Braun and Clarke 2012) which the researcher identified as part of the analysis. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants.

The data from the focus group and interview findings are blended to support the emerging themes, or categories of data (Bryman 2012), that relate to the research questions. The dominant themes are discussed, and sub-themes illuminated under each major theme, to explore the experience of Transition Year students and the value they place on their interests in the career
decision-making process. Direct quotes are used to support this qualitative data throughout this chapter. Some quotations are used to highlight the individual views of the participants, while others were chosen to elucidate parallels or disparities within the group.

The major themes that were identified in analyzing the data are illustrated in Figure 4.1. The image represents four dominant themes that are in a spiral infographic relating to career decision-making. The spiral form symbolizes the constant link between each theme and the continuous process that career decision-making represents.

![Figure 4.1: Emerging themes relating to Career Decision-Making](image)

The first theme to be presented is the importance and value of Transition Year. This will be followed with the theme of Personal and Career Interests. The third theme will discuss the value of Career Interest Profilers. Finally, the process of Career Exploration and Decision-Making will be presented.
4.3 The importance and value of Transition Year
Throughout both the focus group and interviews, the value that students place on participating in the Transition Year Programme was evident, particularly as a year to begin the exploratory process of their career interests. During the focus group, Joe referred to Transition Year as “mind opening” and very helpful with the career exploration process. While acknowledging that he does not yet know what he wants to do, he values the experiences and happenings in preparation for that decision. Having had conversations with his peers in 5th year, whom did not go through the Transition Year Programme, Joe noted:

I think that none of them know what they want to do, or even know how to start thinking about making that decision of what to do.

Kate described the value of Transition Year in her interview as a year that is “about discovering more of yourself and your interests, it gives you a chance to figure out what you like”. This supports other comments from the focus group: “TY is all about finding, you know, a career that suits you. It gives you more time to be able to figure it out”, (Kevin).

4.3.1 Value of Work Experience
During both the focus group and the one-to-one interviews, most participants highlighted the importance of the work experience modules in Transition Year. They each participated in a minimum of four different work placements every Wednesday over the course of the year. Joe referred to his work experience as “the best thing ever”. He had completed work experience in a variety of solicitor’s offices and as a result, he had the opportunity to “decide exactly what kind of law I’d like to get into” (Joe). Elaine supported this opinion on work experience being a valuable opportunity. During the focus group she highlighted the range of third level courses available and how overwhelming the decision could be to decide on a particular course. With this in mind, she found work experience “really helpful”. When the researcher followed this up with her in her one-to-one interview, she discussed the variety of work placements that she went to. She commented that while she did not yet know what she wanted to do, she learned what she did not want to do.
Other participants did not share the same enthusiasm towards work experience. Kate drew attention to the different experiences that students have in similar workplaces. She noted that both her and a friend had worked in two different pharmacies. While her friend had been given the opportunity to gain valuable experience serving customers and stocking shelves, Kate’s experience was quite different:

She actually got more of a real taste of what it was like to properly work in a pharmacy, but I was kind of pushed in the back, I suppose for confidentiality reasons. She was trained to serve customers when I stayed out back and did paperwork. I would have liked to be out front because I like helping people. I think I really would have enjoyed it. So, I suppose work experience is really about where you go. Even in the same type of workplace, everyone has a different experience.

Jane was also disappointed with one of her work placements. She felt she did not receive an accurate knowledge of what working in an engineering company was about. She felt the experience was boring due to the limited tasks that she was given. She made the distinction that it’s not the job that is making you bored, it’s the work experience, you just don’t get a real idea of what it’s all about.

4.3.2 Subject Choice

Many of the participants also valued the Transition Year Programme as they felt it gave them the opportunity to make better subject choice decisions, in advance of senior cycle. During the focus group, Kevin discussed how helpful Transition Year was in facilitating the subject choice decision:

Because the subjects we choose are going to be the backbone of what we’re going to do in and after college, for example, if you want to do science, most of us would have picked science subjects to allow us to go into that degree, whereas if one of us wanted to go into medicine or dentistry, we know we have to take specific science subjects and one wouldn’t be enough. I wouldn’t have known that last year.
This view was also held by Jane, who felt that “the career classes gave me the chance to look up possible careers and find out what subjects I would need that would suit these careers”.

Other students, however, had a contrasting experience and felt that they did not receive enough support in advance of the subject choice decision in relation to matriculation requirements for certain courses, “I think we need more information on the subjects we would need to have for certain courses”, (David). One participant, Brenda, noted that the Transition Year experience did not influence her subject choice decision, as she would have chosen the same senior cycle subjects if she did not complete Transition Year, however, she acknowledged that it definitely helped her choose what she would like to do after school.

During the focus group, some participants felt very strongly that it would be an advantage for them to be offered the opportunity of a one-to-one appointment with a guidance counsellor in advance of subject choice, “I think we should all get an in-depth careers interview, like a one-on-one with the guidance counsellor”, (David). This suggestion was met with resounding agreement from several other members of the focus group. Another participant who agreed with the statement added that they felt it should be a compulsory appointment,

    Maybe people wouldn’t be comfortable, but I think they should have to do it. I don’t think it should be optional.

    (Joe)

When the researcher explored this statement further, David added that he felt if it was not a compulsory appointment, he may feel “embarrassed” to make the appointment himself. Kevin added that he believed students would not open up as much in a group setting, “they’re going to hold back what they’re saying”.

All interviewees were asked at what stage this one-to-one appointment career focused appointment should take place in Transition Year. All participants indicated that the most appropriate time for this conversation would be ahead of the subject choice decision:

    At the subject choice time of year (Brenda).
After Christmas, so January/February time. Before choosing subjects (Elaine). Halfway through the year would be a good point because you haven’t made up your mind for subjects yet. But you’re not brand new to the whole idea of subject choice and careers and stuff like career exploration (David).

4.3.3 Maturation

Taking part in Transition Year, as emphasised by some students, was beneficial for affording them more time and space to mature while learning new skills. This helped them to identify the subjects and careers they would like to pursue, while also giving them the confidence to approach senior cycle with an optimistic and positive attitude. Elaine stated in her interview that she felt “more prepared to make big decisions”. David felt very enthusiastic about progressing into 5th year following his experience in TY. He noted he felt more assured in his subject choice than he would have a year ago. David also added that if he had gone straight into 5th year without participating in TY, he would not be as focused and as dedicated as he felt he is now.

Well in 3rd year, I didn’t know what I wanted to do, or what subjects to pick. Now I’ve done TY, and well, if I didn’t, and if I was in 5th year now, I know I’d still be the messer I was, and I just wouldn’t be focused. Now that I’ve done TY, I can’t wait to get back into 5th year. I feel like I know where I’m going now and what I want, I just can’t wait to get in to 5th year, and learn more about the subjects that I enjoy, that’ll help me get into the course I want and help me reach my goals in life. I know now where my future is, so I’ll actually want to concentrate and learn. Because of TY I’ll be more passionate about my subjects in 5th year.

Kate noted that a year ago, in 3rd year, she was “just going with the flow” and “not putting a lot of thought into subject choice”. The experience of Transition Year taught her the importance of decision-making, “I guess I just didn’t realise how big and important these decisions, like subjects and careers, were”. For another student, engaging and participating in Transition Year boosted their self-confidence and helped them to develop their social skills. Kevin acknowledged this constructive outcome and felt he had grown in a positive way over the course of the year,
There were a lot of leadership skills, I got to be class REP, and I really surprised myself how much I grew into it, because before I was really shy.

4.4 Personal and Career Interests
There was a strong emphasis on sports and fitness as key interests for most participants. Most participants value keeping fit and see physical activity as very important, “I like going to the gym because I like being healthy and keeping fit” (Elaine). Four of the five interviewees discussed their interest in sports including hockey, swimming, yoga, soccer, hurling, football and going to the gym. Joe did not share the groups love of sports and described that his interests have changed during his time in secondary school. While he used to enjoy sports, he now focuses more on event organisation and on art, which he has had an interest in since he was in primary school. Surprisingly, this consistency with interests was similar across the group. Most participants had at least one interest or hobby that they had maintained over a long period of time. Elaine mentioned that she had been participating in theatre and drama “since the beginning of primary school”, while Brenda added that she had many interests when she was younger, and became selective with the one’s she would maintain, “My favourites are the ones I do now. So, I kept them the entire way. I’m in the top of where I can be in soccer.”

4.4.1 Expectation on Developing Interests into Careers
Following on from the discussion on personal interests, many participants highlighted their preference of keeping their personal interests and hobbies separate to their future careers. Some felt that doing so would allow for a continued passion for both their hobby and their work:

I want to keep my hobbies and my career separate. To be able to leave my job and pick up my hobby – that’s important. I wouldn’t want to lose interest in my hobby.

(Brenda)

Joe was also of the opinion that they should be separate, albeit for different reasons. He outlined that while he is very passionate about art and would love to continue it as a therapeutic hobby, he felt he “wouldn’t want it as a career because there aren’t many jobs in it and the pay wouldn’t be good”. David discussed his love and passion for farming, “I loved it growing up. It gave me
something to get up for”. However, when asked would that be a consideration for his future, he was adamant that it was “not realistic” as he felt their current farm is not sustainable long term. Elaine referred to her time in Transition Year as a time to mature, which gave her the space to establish the difference between dreams and reality:

> When you’re younger, you have these dreams. But, a lot of the time they’re not possible, they’re not reality. And then you kind of realise you have to differentiate between career and what your dream is.

While discussing her interest in piano and lifesaving, Jane was very clear that she would keep these interests separate to a career. She felt she could use these interests and skills as part time jobs to support herself while going through college but that they would not be a “realistic future”. In contrast to this opinion, Kate recognized the value of integrating her interest in languages into her career:

> For me, it’s very important to incorporate my interests – I love languages – so I will do Commerce with French; practice what I love while doing a good degree.

This resonated with Alan, who would like to incorporate his love of sports into a well-paid career, without ruining his love for his hobby. He felt connecting the two would be a good solution:

> So, for example, Sports Psychology. It’s linked to my hobby. It’s important that your hobby and career are both linked but that they’re not the same thing.

Kevin felt similarly, stating that he felt it is “important to have a passion for what you are doing, not just for financial reasons, you should have a real interest in it”.

### 4.5 The Value of Career Interest-Profilers

Phase one of this research began with participants completing the online CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP), to measure the relative strengths of their interests. When discussing the use of the profiler, there were varied opinions in terms of it being a tool to aid career exploration. Kevin
referred to the career matching tool that followed the online test as the most interesting aspect of the tool as it highlighted “so many jobs I never know about or had even heard of” that were related to his interests. Elaine shared this sentiment. She had assumed at the beginning of the interest test that the career matching would result in accountancy, and was pleasantly surprised when it also suggested similar, but alternative careers, “they came up with a few jobs that I wouldn’t have thought of before”. Likewise, Brenda agreed that the profiler was helpful, especially as a tool to aid in subject choice:

It gave me a really big list of careers that I could be matched to and I could look them up and see what kind of subjects I’d need for them courses.

In terms of subject choice, David also felt the tool was helpful. While he was confident in his choices prior to sitting the Interest-Profiler, he felt that

It confirmed what was already in my head, rather than decide. It backed me up, so it was a boost for my confidence in my subjects.

Other participants felt it was helpful, however it should be used with caution depending on a person’s mindset. Alan felt that if a person had a clear idea of what their interests already are, and what they would like to do, the profiler is a good tool to “make it clearer”. Jane noted that while it can be very useful in confirming interests, if unexpected results arose for a person, it may be a hinderance to their decision-making –

If you got something completely opposite then I think it would hinder it a lot. Just because you’re confident, it can still give you a blow.

Joe also agreed that the profiler should be used with caution. He added that if the person using the instrument has little confidence in knowing what their interests are, they may rely too heavily on it:

I wouldn’t put too much weight on it, but I’d rather do it than not do it. You can’t solely rely on it. You have to have other influencing factors and definitely explore different things.
4.5.1 Detection of Pattern in the Interest-Profiler

While many participants valued the use of the CPIP in confirming their career interests, interestingly, some were also of the opinion that they could sway the results due to the pattern of questions, to match their own expectations of their interests. Brenda made the observation that questions could be answered in a pattern of consistency in certain categories, which fitted her perception of what she wanted, “If I wanted to be a doctor, I’ll make sure I answer the questions to be social and get to be a doctor”. Jane agreed, remarking that if a person liked the two options given in a question equally, they may choose the option that will match their perceived interest, “even if you do like the other answer, you’re going to press the one that’s going to suit you for the results”. Joe felt similarly and stated that while it is a good reassurance tool, people should “not overthink it” as they could “cheat in it”.

4.5.2 Evaluation of Interests Changing over Time

There was a suggestion in the focus group for the Careers Portal Interest-Profiler to be used at the beginning of Transition Year, and then again towards the end of the year as a means of evaluating if interests change over time. This recommendation was discussed further during the one-to-one interviews. Some participants felt that the Transition Year Programme was a year for self-development, and that it would be an advantage to complete the Interest-Profiler twice as a measure of self-development:

In TY you change a lot as a person, I feel like I’ve changed quite a bit. It’s quite interesting, even for yourself, even if it doesn’t affect anything you’re ever going to do. It’s quite interesting to know, to learn more about yourself.

(Elaine)

Brenda shared this opinion. When discussing taking the Interest-Profiler twice, she noted that if there was a difference in her interests it would give her food for thought in terms of her work experiences in TY, and how they have changed due to her participation in the programme. Joe felt it would add value to his overall experience. It would be a “pat on the back to see that we’ve actually had a difference and made progress rather than just wasting time and money over the year”.


David believed it would be an interesting research project as part of TY and that he could use the results as confirmation of career decision-making progress.

You could use it to see how TY has influenced you with your career choices. And if it hasn’t changed, then you’re probably set on what you do.

Contrary to the idea of using it as an evaluation tool over time, other participants felt they would not need a test to measure if their interests change over time. Kevin felt confident that the work placements and various experiences he participated in throughout the course of the year have changed him and he did not feel the want or need to measure it, “I wouldn’t think it’s necessary for me to know, I guess this year in TY, I already know I have changed”.

4.6 Career Exploration and Decision-Making
A key theme that emerged throughout the focus group and individual interviews was the experiences and challenges students face relating to career decision-making.

4.6.1 Preparation of Career Decision-Making
Most participants responses to the question “Is the career decision-making process one that concerns you?” acknowledged a level of pressure. David stated he felt “I think it’s a lot of pressure at a young age”. Worryingly, Kevin added he felt “a good bit of pressure” because “in two years time, I have to have my mind made up to know what I want to do for the rest of my life”. Alan also felt similarly, stating he was worried he would reach the end of his Leaving Certificate and “not know what job I want to do”.

Interestingly, the female participants were somewhat more optimistic about the process of career decision-making, acknowledging that while there was some pressure, there was also plenty of time and there were many options available to them. Brenda noted:

Well it’s still quite early, and even if you do the wrong course, you can always do a postgraduate course in what you want. I’m probably less prepared than I was before TY, because there’s more jobs than I ever knew there were. But in a good way, like, now I know I have options. So, you know, I might be less prepared, but I know more stuff, so it’s all good.
Kate echoed this optimism “it does worry me, but I tell myself that it will work out. There’s always a way to get into what you want”, while Jane expressed her belief that “I think that times have changed, even if you make a wrong decision, just start again”.

When questioned further about what was the cause of the possible pressures that participants associated with career decision-making, there was a mixed response. David felt the school environment added to the pressure, “it’s not one person individually, it’s the whole environment”. He also added that having an extra year in TY increased the expectation that he should know what he wants to do, “I’ve been given this great opportunity of an extra year to help with the decision, So I’m kind of expected to know”. A mutual comment from Alan pointed out that he felt a pressure having participated in TY,

People expect you to know what you want to do. And to be all kind of wrapped up in a bow and you know, have it all worked out, but it’s not like that at all.

Elaine was of the opinion that “it’s a lot to put on us when we still have exams to go. I think the education system in general is pretty pressurised, it’s a lot to put on a 16-year-old”. An interesting response came from Joe, who felt that the pressure he felt was intrinsic, as opposed to coming from extrinsic sources. He felt with all the opportunities afforded to him in TY, that he should “know by now”. Joe added:

After all the stuff we’ve been through, the career tests, the work experience, I should know. But it’s just there’s so many good options out there. I’m worried that if I cut one thing off forever, well in another life I might have a had better life if I chose it.

Brenda also noted the pressure to make the right career decision was coming from herself. She wants to be able to look back on life, feeling confident that “every decision I made was the right decision”.

4.6.2 Influences of Career Decision-Making
One of the sub-themes that emerged was the range of influences that appear to play a significant role for the participants in their career decision-making process.
4.6.2.1 Working with People
The five participants that partook in the one-to-one interviews shared a common view that they would like to work with people. David spoke about the importance of being around people, that “working in groups can lift your spirits while working alone would be very isolating”, while Joe commented that he “gets energy from other people”.

Brenda discussed her experiences in work placement. Many of them involved working with people. This had influenced her career decision-making as she was now “cutting off possible careers in business like finance because it’s less working with people; and focusing on other areas where you’d be around people”. Elaine described her TY work experience as very valuable as it resulted in her realising she wanted to work with people.

4.6.2.2 Labour Market Information
Interviewees had a varied response to a question on whether they believed that labour market needs and job availabilities would influence their career decision-making. David associated the decision with the type of degree he does, noting that if he does a very “narrow, specific degree”, then labour market needs would not be relevant, however in a “broader degree, well then yea, you’d have to consider what jobs there is a demand for”. Joe felt that job availabilities would be a significant influence for him as his priority would be finding a secure job that he would have a comfortable living. He shared his experience of a family member losing a job:

Anything could happen. Your business could shut down any day. It happened to my dad, so I see the need to have a back-up. You want to have a job that is easy to get, that there is plenty out there.

(Joe)

Both Elaine and Brenda shared different perspectives. Elaine valued following her heart as being important. Brenda agreed, stating that “you can’t choose your job for money, you have to choose it for you, it’s too important, you have to love what you do”.
4.7 Summary of Findings

To summarise, the primary findings elucidated the main aim of the research, to investigate the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year students, in the decision-making process for career exploration. The findings reveal the myriad of factors, and the complex interwoven link between these factors and their influence on the career decision-making process. Overall the findings demonstrated that participants found value in using the Career Interest Profiler and that the instrument should be considered for future use in Career Guidance with Transition Year classes, with a follow up one-to-one guidance interview. The findings also reveal a strong emphasis on keeping personal interests separate to career interests. The participants who took part in this study had clear and well-articulated thoughts on the topic discussed and placed great value on Transition Year as an opportunity for maturation.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented descriptive accounts of the findings of the focus group and interviews carried out over the course of this research. Using thematic analysis, the main themes and sub-themes were identified, presented and analysed. The following chapter will discuss the primary research findings in relation to previous research and the Literature Review, Chapter 2.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction
The aim of this chapter is to discuss the overall findings of the research within the context of the data gathered and the literature reviewed. This will be facilitated by discussing the main themes that arose in the research and will be guided by the related literature as outlined in chapter 2. Relevant ethical considerations in the administration of psychometric assessment will also be discussed.

5.1 Overview of Research Findings
This section will succinctly contextualise the discussion in the context of the research questions underpinning the study. This study set out to investigate the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year students, in the decision-making process for career exploration. Secondary research questions set out to examine whether students in Transition Year see value in the exploration of career interests and examined the expectations these students placed on their current interests shaping their future careers. We also looked at what interventions they find most useful when making their subject choice decision, and finally, what the implications are for guidance counsellors using Career Interest Instruments with students.

The key findings from this study indicate that students found value in using the Career Interest Profiler in advance of making their subject choice for senior cycle. However, the participants identified some factors to be considered when using the instrument. The research identified several elements that influence the career decision-making process, including access to one-to-one guidance counselling appointments in Transition Year. In addition, the participants placed great value on Transition Year as an opportunity for maturation.

The discussion is presented under the following four key themes which have emerged from the data analysis:

1. The Value of Transition Year.
2. Personal and Career Interests.
3. The Value of Career Interest Profilers.

5.2 The Value of Transition Year
Participation in Transition Year offers students space to learn, to mature and to develop, in the absence of exam pressure (DES 1995). All the participants who took part in the focus groups and interviews indicated that they benefited from partaking in the Transition Year Programme. Their attitudes toward the Transition Year Programme reflects the view of the DES (1995) that Transition Year provides opportunities for participants, opportunities which are not received by those who go directly into the senior cycle programme.

Pupils entering the Leaving Certificate programme on completion of a Transition Year should be better equipped and more disposed to study than their counterparts who did not have the benefit of this year.

(DES 1995, p 3)

Once such opportunity is the space provided in the academic calendar for the students to take part in a work placement. TY students that participate in work experience mature in both attitude and personality, thus increasing their self-concept and their ability to make more informed educational and career decisions (Jeffers 2011). Some students suggested that work experience gave them a greater insight into several careers, which was helpful to them at this stage of the career decision-making process. While they may not yet have made a firm decision in relation to career choice post-secondary school, the experience of a work placement helped them to eliminate areas where they had no interest.

One of the central roles of the guidance counsellor is to support students during transitional periods of their lives (NGF 2007). A major finding of this study was the emphasis that participants place on having an opportunity to have a one-to-one meeting with a guidance counsellor in advance of their subject choice decision, “I think we should all get an in-depth careers interview, like a one-on-one with the guidance counsellor”, (David). Guidance counsellors are the most knowledgeable providers of reliable and accurate information regarding subject choice for students (NCGE 2018, DES 2005b, Smyth et al. 2011). Guidance relating to subject choice may have significant influence on both a student’s educational path and their life
(McCoy et al. 2014, OECD 2004). It has been recognized that career guidance is a fundamental service, which should be provided by schools, to aid and assist students in their decision-making for both subject and career choices in the transitory period between junior and senior cycle (OECD 2004, DES 2005b, NGF 2007). A large proportion of the participants highlighted the value and relevance of their career classes. However, several felt they would also benefit from a personal guidance appointment, on a one-to-one basis, with a guidance counsellor to discuss their subject options. Everitt et al. (2018, p.2) define personal guidance as:

A structured career conversation between a careers professional and a young person. This usually takes place face-to-face and one-to-one.

One reason provided for this suggestion was that a person may feel uncomfortable opening up fully within a class or a group setting. It was also felt a compulsory appointment with a guidance counsellor would be beneficial since some students might feel embarrassed to make the appointment themselves. There is evidence to suggest students prefer one-to-one guidance where they feel they can ask questions without judgement (McCoy et al. 2006). Research also suggests that personal guidance can also support a young person’s personal effectiveness, which addresses their self-image, self-efficacy, motivation and resilience (Everitt et al. 2018, Career Development Institute [CDI] 2018). As the Transition Year Programme is one with a strong focus on personal and social development (Jeffers 2011), a personal guidance appointment would help in enhancing an individual’s personal awareness and development. A previous study highlighted that students may not have an opportunity to discuss psychometric test results until they have a one-to-one appointment with a guidance counsellor (Hearne et al. 2016a). With that in mind it would be important for students to be offered the opportunity to discuss their Career Interest Profiler results, and as noted by participants in this research, this discussion would be easier in a one-to-one setting. The findings of this study highlight the need for one-to-one personal guidance sessions during Transition Year to discuss subject choice and career options at senior cycle. The role of a guidance counsellor is to assist students navigate transitions, to help them explore a variety of options while supporting their decision-making (NCGE 2004). The one-to-one setting supports this function and is the ideal opportunity for the guidance
counsellor to become attuned to the aspirations of their students, which can in turn be helpful when discussing goals and future career choices (Nyles 2011).

The research analysed the impact that the Transition Year Programme had on participant’s maturity levels. The TY Programme supports the personal, social, educational and vocational development of students (DES 1995). One participant in this study felt that having completed the TY Programme, she was “more prepared to make big decisions” (Elaine). Many interviewees were confident about the subject choices that they made and were relating their academic subjects to possible future career decisions. However, upon reflection one student noted that since that decision was made in the preceding year, they did not know then what they wanted to do and so made choices that did not necessarily support their longer-term goals. A lack of support when making major decisions, such as subject choice decisions at a young age, can have consequences such as a delay in career decision-making (Ferry 2006). Maturity levels among adolescents vary, as they develop, their ability to make educational and life choices that lead to career readiness also develops (Sharf 2013). The extra year that Transition Year provides, may contribute to greater psychological career maturity, which is vital in making important life decisions (Barnes et al. 2011). Smyth (2016) outlines that an extra school year, between junior and senior cycle can give students time to reflect on previous experiences, developing their personal, emotional and social awareness, which can influence and impact subject choices for senior cycle.

5.3 Personal and Career Interests
Curry and Milsom (2017) acknowledge the importance of knowing oneself in early adolescent career growth. When young people are offered an opportunity to reflect on their interests and skills, their self-awareness is enhanced. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2002) highlights the importance of self-awareness among adolescents and describes the important role that guidance counselling plays in the education system in laying the foundations for lifelong career development knowledge and competencies relating to self-awareness, decision-making and transitions.
Definitions of interests generally tend to focus on a person’s likes and dislikes (Coaley 2014). Carlson (2002) argued that interests could be understood as a form of desire, particularly for what people want to understand and do. Thus, interests imply what people enjoy and do not enjoy doing. A person’s interests are considered to be a subset of their attitude, relating to their evaluation of personal beliefs. When people feel positive about their beliefs, they want to do more of it and therefore show more interest in it (Coaley 2014). Thus, it can be argued that an individual’s interests can influence the career decision-making process (Sharf 2013). Results of a study conducted by Low et al. (2005) support that the vocational interests of adolescents are intricately linked to both their individual and academic interests. Elsworth et al. (1999) posits that subject choices and preferences made in senior cycle are consistent to the individual’s vocational interests, and in particular Holland’s RIASEC types. Interestingly, the findings in this study supported this theory as several participants had chosen subjects for senior cycle based on their vocational interests. David was confident in his choice of two business options as he hopes to pursue a career in business.

Participants in this research all spoke very enthusiastically about their personal interests. Many maintained their interests from a young age. And yet, when asked would they consider these interests as possible career avenues, several of the interviewees highlighted their preference in keeping their personal interests separate to their future careers

I want to keep my hobbies and my career separate. To be able to leave my job and pick up my hobby – that’s important. I wouldn’t want to lose interest in my hobby.

(Brenda)

Age may present as a factor in the reluctance from some participants in considering a career within their personal interests. There is a link between age and adolescent vocational interest stability, where there is a common belief that vocational interests prior to the age of sixteen are too unstable to be accurate predictors of future outcomes (Low et al. 2005). Holland asserts that preferences for certain careers are based on stereotypes of the people who perform them; and that people use the same stereotype to organise their views of themselves and especially occupations (Watts et al. 2005). It is possible that the participants beliefs in relation to careers
which stem from personal interests are somewhat clouded by stereotypical attitudes toward certain careers. Joe spoke of his enjoyment for art and drawing yet did not see a future in it for financial reasons, remarking “artists these days struggle, it’s so hard to be successful as an artist”. Erikson (1950) recognised identity formation/development as a major personality achievement of adolescence. The conflict of adolescent identity versus role confusion involves the adolescent defining who they are, their values, and the direction they choose to pursue in life (Berk 2008). The research recognizes that some of the participants in this research are experiencing this developmental stage. Also observable among participants is Ginzberg’s theory, which acknowledges the lifelong process of vocational decision-making, and describes how people continuously reassess their choices to “improve the fit between their changing career goals and the realities of the world of work” (Ginzberg 1984, p. 180).

For other participants, it was very important to integrate their personal interests into their careers. Kate discussed her passion for languages and wants to incorporate them into her future. Kevin also felt it was important to have a passion and highlighted the importance of choosing a career for interest, as opposed to only for financial gain. While there was a difference in the emphasis that participants placed on their current interests shaping their future careers, there was consensus among all participants that having an understanding of their interests would support them in making better career decisions.

5.4 The Value of Career Interest Profilers
Vocational interests play a pivotal role in the range and types of role a person will undertake, with a specific emphasis on career choice and entry (Fouad 1999). Interest inventories have been a dominant career counselling methodology since their development in 1914 (Harrington and Long 2013). Interests have become the most significant trait used in vocational selection. This is due to the ability to predict occupational selection more accurately from interests than from aptitude (Sharf 2013). Mainly used as an aid to self-assessment, interest inventories typically measure individual responses to items in the inventory and compare them to the responses of people working in a variety of occupations (Kidd 2006). They generally have scales for specific occupations and are particularly useful when an individual has difficulty in identifying interests that have arisen from several prior learning experiences (Sharf 2013).
Providing a profile indicating interests in a range of high, medium and low scores can contribute to focusing the client on specific career categories and giving less focus to others. It can be argued that an adolescent’s career interest profile is a summary of life goals, self-beliefs, competencies and values beyond the wall of the classroom (Low et al. 2005) and can therefore be very useful as a tool in supporting the growth and awareness of the client (Harrington and Long 2013).

Participants who took part in the study had varying opinions on the value of using an interest assessment following the CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) in phase one of the research. Some participants saw considerable benefits for career exploration as it provided a list of several possible careers that may suit the candidate. Both Kevin and Elaine acknowledged the many careers listed in their profiles that they had never heard of. They felt this was eye opening and gave them numerous alternative career options to explore which they had not previously considered. In guidance counselling, the aim of using interest inventories is not only to identify specific careers or occupations that suit an individual, but to help the individual learn about the potential careers and how they differ (Kidd 2006). David felt one of the advantages he could take from the experience was the confidence he gained in his subject choice decision. His CPIP results gave a clear insight into his preferred activities and subjects, thus confirming his academic interests and reaffirmed his subject choices. One limitation identified by participants in the use of the CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) was the detection of pattern in answering the questions. It was observed that questions might be answered in a consistent pattern in certain categories where that category fitted a perceived suitable or preferred career.

The increased availability of psychometric tests such as interest tests online was considered convenient by participants, as noted by several interviewees during this research. However, the automatic result feedback, may contribute to the impression that the test results are always completely accurate and absolute, and may possibly discourage questioning and exploration (Campbell 1987). One interviewee observed that if a person’s profile identified unexpected interests, they may not question it. Depending on their self-confidence and self-awareness, they may in turn neglect to explore careers that they otherwise would have i.e. without guidance the results of an indicator could erect psychological barriers to a particular career path.
5.5 Career Exploration and Decision-Making

Participants expressed a need for an increased number of career classes at junior cycle level, especially in 2nd and 3rd year. Literature suggests that there is an inconsistent approach to guidance counselling across the Irish post primary sector since the budget cuts of 2012 (IGC 2016). There may be an imbalance in guidance provision between junior and senior cycle in certain schools, resulting in a deficiency in guidance provision at junior cycle (DES 2009, Hearne et al. 2016a). Some schools identified that minimal contact took place in junior cycle in advance of subject choice between students and the guidance counsellor. Feeling among some students was that guidance and subject advice needed to be sought out rather than offered by the guidance counsellor (Hearne et al. 2016a). The junior cycle reform has provided the opportunity for an increase in guidance contact time with students in junior cycle, with an increase in flexibility in wellbeing hours that can be utilised to meet the needs of the students of an individual school (DES 2015a). This reform will allow schools to meet their obligation to provide “appropriate” guidance (Government of Ireland 1998, p.13). The guidance needs of all students can be met while using a continuum of support model, whereby the amount of guidance provided to students is congruent to the level of guidance needed by students (Sampson 2018).

There was a consensus among participants that they found value in completing a Careers Learning Programme in Transition Year, and that there was an emphasis on the use of Information Communication Technology [ICT] within their careers classes in the delivery of this programme. ICT has long been recognised as a supportive resource in the delivery of guidance counselling services (Vourinen et al. 2011). It supports independent learning by enabling students to access, explore and discover as oppose to merely listening and remembering (Noor-UL-Amin 2013). The DES (2015b) support the sentiment that having access to ICT in the delivery of guidance is essential in providing a better and more efficient service to young people today. While the assumption can be made that with increased access to guidance and flexibility of delivery methods supported by ICT, there could be a lower demand for one-to-one guidance support (Bimrose et al. 2015), research continues to maintain that young people prefer face-to-face interaction with guidance counsellors, alongside ICT provision (Bimrose et al. 2010). This research supports these findings as several participants expressed the viewpoint that discussing their interest assessment feedback, as well as their subject choice
in a one-to-one setting with a guidance counsellor would benefit them greatly in the career exploration process.

Research suggests that a Career Learning Programme, including a module relating to learning about oneself can improve an individual’s career decision-making skills. In a study carried out by Hirschi and Läge (2008), the cognitive information processing (CIP) approach as well as the CASVE model (Communication, Analysis, Synthesis, Valuing, Execution) (Sampson 2018) were used as guiding principles for student’s own career decision-making process understanding. One module consisted of participants assessing their own vocational interests with the application of Holland’s (1997) RIASEC model and receiving individualized feedback (Hirschi and Läge 2008). Following the intervention, participants were found to show a significant increase in career choice readiness in terms of the key variables: career decidedness, career planning, career exploration, and vocational identity. While this developmental intervention was confirmed to promote positive career development for a wide range of students, practitioners and guidance counsellors should be mindful that it does not address specific at risk populations, and as such, more tailored and specific interventions, that will be more time consuming, may be required (Hirschi and Läge 2008).

As described in chapter 2, being appreciative of the various decision-making styles and career theories will provide guidance counsellors with a clearer understanding of indecision amongst adolescents, affording them the ability to employ interventions that best match the individual needs of the adolescent (Gati et al. 2010). The link between an individual’s interests and self-efficacy can lead to an increased understanding of their career decision-making (Tracey 2010b). The social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown and Hackett 1994, 2000) posited that both self-efficacy assessments and interests are fundamental in career decisions, and their joint usage are recommended in career counselling (Betz 2007). Participants of this study had very strong viewpoints of wanting to have an occupation that would be congruent with their interests and self-efficacy. Brenda was particularly concerned with choosing a career that would result in both satisfaction and productivity, “I’d like to be content in my life and look back and think ‘that was the best thing I could've done, every decision I made was the right decision.’”
The literature review (chapter 2) supports that adolescence is a period of remarkable change. There is a myriad of career development theories and career interventions that guidance counsellors can use with adolescents in support of their career exploration and decision-making. Being cognisant of the ambitions, goals and needs of students in career counselling, guidance counsellors can both determine appropriate interventions for use with individual students, while also making implications for the career-choice readiness of the students, thus determining the amount of intervention required (Hirschi and Läge 2007, Sampson 2018).

5.6 Ethical Considerations in the use of Psychometric Assessment
Psychometric assessment is a branch of psychology that attempts to measure personal attributes, individual differences and psychological variables (Murphy and Davidshofer, 2005). Psychometric tests are used to understand and predict human behaviour (Fitzgerald and Farrell 2014) and result in decisions being made about an individual (Coaley 2010). Gage and Berliner’s (1998, p.509) definition of assessment is “the process of collecting, interpreting and synthesizing information in order to 1) Make decisions about students; 2) give students feedback about their progress and their strengths and weaknesses; 3) judge instructional effectiveness and 4) inform educational policy”. The CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) used in phase one of this research is considered a psychometric test.

Complying with both the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI 2011) and Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC 2012) codes of ethics’; and following the best practice guidelines outlined by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE 2015), guidance counsellors will reduce ethical predicaments that may arise, thus ensuring the respect, dignity and welfare of the student (Kimber and Campbell 2014). Establishing consent from students is a primary ethical concern is participating in the psychometric test, and if they are under eighteen, consent from their parent/guardian/carer must be received (IGC 2012). To ensure informed consent, it is imperative that the guidance counsellor disseminates the relevant information to students, such as the purpose of taking the test, how the results will be used, who will have access to the data, and the consequences of taking or not taking the test (Fitzgerald and Farrell 2014).
It is crucial that all test results are treated confidentially (IGC 2012). If guidance counsellors use the CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) with students, they must ensure that if they have access to student’s findings, they are treated in confidence. Coaley (2014) asserts that test results must be explained by those who have technical knowledge. The guidance counsellor therefore must ensure that they explain the findings and results clearly to participants, exercising discretion where needed (IGC 2012).

When selecting assessment instruments for use in schools, they must be appropriate and have a clear and defined purpose (DES 2017b). Particular caution must be exercised when considering which instrument to use with students with special educational needs (SEN), or those that study English as an additional language (EAL). The post-primary guidance counsellor must be aware of the special educational needs of test participants when using all psychometric assessments, including the CPIP, and their associated limitations. Some students may be challenged by the language of this test and so supports will need to be provided to students who have a low reading ability (Frederickson and Cline 2007). The Psychological Society of Ireland (2011) advise members that in maintaining professional and ethical standards, they should attend appropriate supervision and participate in continuous professional development in psychometric testing. Harrington and Long (2013) also recommend that guidance counsellors keep abreast of the variation of instruments available. Career counsellors are now serving diverse populations and as such, must tailor the service and instruments used accordingly, because “the one-size-only approach does not fit all” (Harrington and Long 2013, p. 91).

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the overall findings of the study in the context of the literature. Primary themes were examined to infer the relevance of exploring ‘personal interest’ in the career decision-making process for Transition Year students. The findings reveal the multitude of factors, and the complex interwoven link between these factors and their influence on the career decision-making process. The findings revealed that participants have a strong sense of their personal and career interests, and how those interests influence their career decision-making. While views expressed during the focus group relating to personal interests developing into career interests had many similarities, contrasting views were also apparent. Participants found
value in using the CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) and acknowledged its relevance for future use in career classes, however they also recognized potential limitations. They acknowledged the importance of discussing their interests and CPIP results in a one-to-one setting with a guidance counsellor, with many stating that this opportunity should be ‘mandatory’.

Chapter 6 will conclude the research study and highlight any strengths and limitations of the study. Recommendations for policy and future practice will also be outlined.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction
This chapter will offer a conclusion within the context of the aims and objectives of the study as set out in chapter 1. The strengths and limitations of the study are presented. The chapter also offers recommendations pertaining to the findings. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a reflection of personal learning of the researcher.

6.1 Summary of Findings
The overall aim of this study was to investigate the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with students in Transition Year, in the decision-making process for career exploration. Additionally, there were several objectives identified to address the overarching aim. Firstly, an examination of relevant literature on the topic was undertaken, involving critical analysis of policy and practice of guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools, the senior cycle programmes available in Irish post-primary schools, the complex area of career decision-making and finally the use of psychometric instruments with specific emphasis on career interest inventories. In order to explore the research title a qualitative approach was applied, as the researcher wished to understand the relevance of using interest instruments from the student perspective. Phase one of the research involved the administration of a CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) with twenty-six transition year students in a post-primary school in the west of Ireland. Phase two consisted of a structured focus group with a total of eight participants from the phase one cohort. This was followed by semi-structured one-to-one interviews with five students from the focus group cohort.

The data from the focus group and interview findings were blended to identify four emerging themes. These were:

1. The importance and value of Transition Year.
2. Personal and Career Interests.
3. The value of Career Interest Profilers.

In the previous Discussion Chapter, the four arching themes were discussed.
Participation in Transition Year affords students space to learn, to mature and to develop, without exam pressure (DES 1995). The findings of this study firstly identified the value that students place on participating in the Transition Year Programme, particularly as a year to begin the exploratory process of their career interests. Participation in work experience provided students the opportunity to mature in both attitude and personality, developing their self-concept while increasing their ability to make better informed educational and career decisions (Jeffers 2011). It also provided students with a greater insight into the workplace (Smyth and Calvert 2011). A major finding of this study was the emphasis that participants place on having an opportunity to have a one-to-one meeting with a guidance counsellor in advance of their subject choice decision, which can have significant impact on both a student’s educational path and their life (McCoy et al. 2014, OECD 2004). Maturity levels vary among adolescents (Sharf 2013) and this study found that participants greatly benefited by the Transition Year Programme as it afforded them more time and space to mature while learning new skills.

Specifically in relation to students interests and career exploration, there was a mixed response from interviewees in terms of the expectations they place on their current interests shaping their future careers. Some interviewees emphasised their preference in keeping their personal interests separate to their future careers. Literature suggests that personal interests and preferences for certain careers may be clouded by stereotypical attitudes towards these careers (Watts et al. 2005). Other participants felt strongly about integrating their personal interests into their careers. Similar to findings by Low et al. (2005), the career interests of these interviewees are intricately linked to both their individual and academic interests. For these students, their future career aspirations played a key role in the subjects chosen for senior cycle.

The researcher can elucidate that participants generally found value in the use of a career interest instrument in the decision-making process. There was interest from several interviewees in the career matching tool as it identified a range of careers previously unheard of, that may suit an individual (Kidd 2006). Other participants gained confidence in their subject choice from carrying out the Interest-Profiler as the results gave a clear insight into their academic interests (Harrington and Long 2013). Limitations of the CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) also arose from the study. An observation was made that questions could be answered in a pattern
of consistency in certain categories that fitted the perception of what a person wanted, thus implying that results could be achieved that would match an individual’s perceived interest, rather than their true authentic interests.

Arising from the findings of this study, it emerged that students in junior cycle would benefit with an increase in access to career classes, especially in 2nd and 3rd year. There may be an imbalance in guidance provision between junior and senior cycle in certain schools, resulting in a deficiency in guidance provision at junior cycle (DES 2009, Hearne et al. 2016a). Guidance provision in Transition Year was highly praised, but a whole school approach to guidance delivery would enhance students’ experience in junior cycle with subject choices (Hearne and Galvin 2014, Hearne et al. 2016a).

Literature supports that adolescence is a period of remarkable change (Berk 2014). There is a myriad of career development theories and career interventions that guidance counsellors can use with adolescents in support of their career exploration and decision-making (Gati et al. 2010). The career choice readiness of students needs to be considered by guidance counsellors, when determining which interventions are most appropriate to use with individual students. Findings from this study gauge how individual career choice readiness is, with most participants displaying different degrees of career choice readiness, while being at different stages of the career exploration process.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The study aimed to inform the researcher of the value of using a Career Interest Instrument with students in the decision-making process for career exploration. A key strength of the study is that it created an opportunity for the voice of Transition Year students to be heard regarding their perceptions of the relevance of Career Interest Instruments. The strong emphasis on the interpretivist paradigm, as used in this research, created the opportunity for the researcher to observe the perceptions, feelings, thoughts and actions of the research participants (Thomas 2017) while listening attentively and drawing inferences to gain an understanding of their viewpoints of career interests and the career decision-making process.
These observations could have been overlooked had a greater emphasis been placed on a positivist approach (Cohen et al. 2018). Alternatively, the researcher chose to take up an insider role in the research, gaining a deeper understanding of the viewpoints of the participants (Thomas 2017).

A further strength of this study is the openness and honesty of participants in both the focus group and the individual follow-up interviews. The participants who took part in this study had clear and well-articulated thoughts on the topic, which was an advantage to the researcher. The researcher’s teaching experience was also a benefit to the study as the researcher understood the importance of professionalism, trust, and mutual respect, which was beheld during all stages of data gathering.

In this research, the qualitative approach utilised consisted of convenience sampling. The sample population was small; therefore, it would be inappropriate to generalise the findings from this research and apply it to the guidance service in all post primary schools in Ireland. If phase one of the research was opened to all Transition Year and 5th year students, it may lead to a more diverse reflection of the opinions of career interests.

While the researcher aimed to remain honest and objective throughout the data analysis process, as it was a qualitative study, personal bias may be an issue. The researchers position as a teacher and trainee guidance counsellor in the school may also lead the research open to accusation of bias. Therefore, a reflective approach was adopted enabling the researcher to offer more trustworthy and honest accounts (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). Theme mapping (Braun and Clarke 2012) was employed for data analysis therefore, a further limitation of the research may be the researcher’s subjective interpretation of the data (Cohen et al. 2018).

If the researcher were to undertake this research again, a mixed method approach may be appropriate to facilitate a more substantial study. The use of a survey with a larger group of participants would produce a large amount of quantitative data that could be used to complement the qualitative data obtained from the focus group and interviews. This would be useful in
gaining a broader understanding of the perceptions of students on the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument in career exploration.

6.3 Recommendations
Arising from the findings of this study, a number of recommendations in terms of policy, practice and research can be made:

6.3.1 Policy
1. For students in Junior Cycle to receive the necessary guidance in preparation for Senior Cycle, while also enabling the guidance team to facilitate more personal guidance in the utilization of specific guidance interventions, including Career Interest Instruments, it is strongly recommended that the DES reinstate the ex-quota allocation of guidance hours.

2. School management, with the Guidance Counsellor, should ensure that there is a collaborative approach to career exploration. This process should be a whole school approach, led by the guidance counsellor and supported by subject teachers in such a way that students have access to adequate information in preparation for both subject choice and career decision-making.

3. With the introduction of the new Junior Cycle and the Wellbeing time allocation, there is an opportunity for schools to allow time for the Guidance Counsellor to give classes to Junior Cycle students, preparing them for subject choice, the use of Interest Inventories and career exploration.

6.3.2 Practice
1. Guidance counsellors using the CareersPortal Interest-Profiler (CPIP) as a guidance intervention should use it with caution. The CPIP can give a confidence boost to certain students, however it may result in others relying too heavily on it. Time should be allowed for students to explore some of the careers that arise in the career matching tool following the completion of the CPIP.
2. The topic of interests and results of the CPIP should be given adequate time in one-to-one guidance sessions with senior cycle students.

6.3.3 Research
1. Further research involving a longitudinal study exploring the long-term impact of how interests influence career decision-making would be beneficial to gain a clearer perspective on the relevance of using interest instruments in the career exploration process.

2. As this study focused on Transition Year students, it would be interesting to do similar research with Fifth Year students, to explore if they place different value on their personal interests in shaping their future careers following one academic year in senior cycle.

6.4 Implications
At a practical level, the findings of this research can inform future practice in guidance counselling in post primary education. The findings support the use of Career Interest Instruments in the decision-making process for career exploration. The results, when discussed on a one-to-one level, can support students’ educational plans and career development.

6.5 Reflexivity in relation to Personal Learning
In this study, a reflexive approach was applied to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon while bearing in mind my social, personal and cultural context as a researcher (Etherington 2004). The fundamental model of reflexivity that the researcher applied during this study included note taking and keeping a reflective journal throughout, taking note of any ideas, thoughts, questions and biases that arose to ensure my positionality did not interfere with the research (Denzin and Lincoln 2013).

At the initial stage of the research, I had some preconceptions about the topic that were formulated around my own experiences as a post primary school teacher and a trainee Guidance Counsellor. I had a predetermined idea that a person’s personal interests must surely influence their career decision-making. This study gave me the opportunity to critically evaluate that
defined idea and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the career decision-making process. I have gained an appreciation for the complex and intricate nature that the career decision-making process is, and the pressure that young adults can feel throughout this process. As a Guidance Counsellor I will be cognisant of the process and the various factors that influence career decision-making. For many young people, their idea of a career is very closely linked with what their next step is, be it a specific college course or a job, and many have not yet begun to view their career as a journey through life (Barnes et al. 2011). I will endeavor to support young people to at their early stages of this journey to reach their career potential.

This research has influenced me to become more mindful to engage with junior cycle students where possible to begin supporting them in the career decision-making process. As a future Guidance Counsellor, I will need the support of management and school colleagues in order to deliver a balanced guidance plan where the guidance needs of all students can be met. Furthermore, making time at the end of each school year to consult with school management on the importance of allocating sufficient guidance hours is essential, to ensure the best use of the guidance counsellor’s time in order to meet the needs of all students.

Finally, I have become very appreciative of the benefits of qualitative research, specifically using focus groups as a method of evaluation of work going forward. At the outset of this research, I had considered carrying out a quantitative study owing to my scientific background. I have realized the value of giving students the opportunity to have their voices heard. I was impressed by the openness, clear and well-articulated opinions that the young adults had who generously participated in this research. I had a concern that as I was a practicing teacher in the school, that participants may not feel comfortable with contributing directly and honestly. However, the opposite materialised.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a conclusion to the research study by presenting an overview of the findings in the context of the aims and objectives of the study. This chapter summarized the main findings and addressed the strengths and limitations of the research. Additionally, several recommendations in terms of policy, practice and research were put forward to inform the
discipline of guidance counselling within the post primary sector. The chapter concludes with the researcher’s reflection on her own personal learning.
References


Career Development Institute (2018) *Equipping the young people of today for the career choices of the future: Personal Guidance*, available: 

*Career Interests* (n.d.) CareersPortal.ie, available: 


Department of Education and Science (2005b) *Guidelines for second level schools on the implications of Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students’ access to appropriate guidance*, Dublin: The Stationary Office


Department of Education and Skills (2015b) *Digital Strategy for Schools, Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment*, available: 

Department of Education and Skills (2017a) *Voluntary Secondary Schools; Approved Allocation of Teaching Posts 2017/18 School Year (Circular Letter 0010/2017)* available: 

Department of Education and Skills (2017b) *Assessment Instruments (including tests and web-based resources) approved for use for guidance and/or learning support in post-primary schools from May 2017 until further notice (Circular Letter 0035/2017)*, available: 

Department of Education and Skills (2018) *Post-Primary Education*, available: 


Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2017) *Guidance Counselling Core Competencies and Professional Practice*, available:  

Irish Second Level Students Union (2014) *Transition Year; Exploring the Student Experience*, available:  


National Centre for Guidance in Education (2017) A whole school guidance framework, available:  


https://www.ncca.ie/media/1447/developing_senior_cycle_education-_consultative_paper_on_issues_and_options.pdf  [accessed 26th August 2018]


Parsons, F. (1909) *Choosing a vocation*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin


Smyth, E. and Calvert, E. (2011) *Choices and Challenge; Moving from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle Education*, Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute, available:


Appendices

Appendix A

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

School Principal Information Letter

Date:

EHSRecNo:

Research title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

Dear Principal,
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 Tom Geary. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to investigate the topic of using career interest tools, and their relevance for students entering senior cycle when making subject choice decisions and career exploration. In order to gather this information, I will appreciate if you will give me consent to carry out the research study in your school. This would involve me administering a career interest assessment on Careers Portal to a Transition Year class group. I will follow this by facilitating a focus group with 12 of the students, and 6 follow up one-to-one interviews with students from the focus group. The focus group will take place 20 minutes prior to lunch time.
ending and for the following 40 minute class. It will be held when this group of students have a Careers class. It should be noted that as focus groups are conducted within a group setting, each participant’s contributions will be heard by the other participants within the group. However, each student will be asked to sign an agreement to keep all opinions expressed during the focus group interview private. The one to one interviews of 30 minutes will be held at lunch time in the Guidance Counsellor’s office.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to data analysis 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 the school’s name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the school will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

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

Researcher: Donna Curran
UL Email address: 17115914@studentmail.ul.ie

Research Supervisor: Tom Geary
Email address: Tom.Geary@ul.ie

Research P. I.: Dr. Lucy Hearne
Telephone number: 061 202931
Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Yours Sincerely,
This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSRecNo: ). 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
School Principal Consent Form

EHSRecNo:

**Research Title:** An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration.

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

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.

2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.

3. The focus group and interview data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the supervisors. Excerpts from the focus group and interviews may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Donna Curran to carry out this research in the school.

Signature: ______________________________

Printed name: ______________________________

Signature of Researcher: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

93
Appendix C

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Volunteer Information Sheet

EHSRecNo:

Dear Student,
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 Tom Geary. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

This information sheet will tell you what the study is about.

What is the research about?
The research aims to find out the relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration.

What will I have to do?
Your involvement in the study will be during the timetabled school day – e.g. lunchtime and Career class time. You will be invited to do an online Career Interest Test during careers class. Following this, you will be invited to participate in a one hour focus group with some of your class mates. The focus group will involve 12 students in a group setting being asked questions about their career interests. The focus group will be audio-recorded. The focus group will take place during the last 20 minutes of lunch time and the 40 minute careers class that follows. If you are participating in the focus group you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. The focus group is an opportunity to express your opinion and have a focused discussion about career exploration with your class mates in an informal setting.

Following the focus group, 6 students from the same focus group will be invited to participate in a one-to-one interview to gain further insight into their interests. The purpose of the individual interviews will be to get a deeper understanding of the beliefs and values of
participants. It is my hope that the interview will make a distinction between interests for leisure and interests that may pertain to careers. The interview will be 30 minutes and will take place at lunch time in the Guidance Counsellors office. The interview will also be audio-recorded.

**What are the benefits?**

By participating in this study, students will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences of career exploration. The findings of the study may help Guidance Counsellors to increase their understanding on the use of interest guides and the delivery of guidance.

**What are the risks?**

You might decide that you don’t want to answer a question. If this happens, you do not have to answer any question you do not wish to.

**What if I do not want to take part?**

Participation in this research is voluntary and you can choose not to take part or to stop your involvement in this study prior to the data analysis stage. Non-participation in this study will not affect your relationship with the career guidance teaching team.

**What happens to the information?**

The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely on the researchers’ computer. The computers are password protected. Your name will not appear on any information. You will be assigned a fictitious name when the information is being written in a report by the researcher. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept for seven years. After this time, it will be destroyed. The audio-recorded data will be destroyed following data analysis.

**Who else is taking part?**

Students from your class will be invited to take part in the research. If more than 12 students volunteer to take part in the focus group, I will randomly select 12 students from those who are interested, by drawing random names out of a hat.

**What if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong during the focus group or the interview session, the session will immediately stop until the researcher and student(s) are ready to restart the session or the session would be stopped completely.

**What happens at the end of the study?**

At the end of the study the information will be used to present results. The information will be completely anonymous. No student’s name will appear in any of the results. All data gathered from the research will be stored securely and safely by the Principal Investigator, Dr. Lucy Hearne, in her office for 7 years. Information stored on a computer will be password protected and subsequently destroyed according to UL guidelines.
What if I have more questions or do not understand something?
If you have any questions about the study you may contact any of the researchers. It is important that you feel that all your questions have been answered.

What happens if I change my mind during the study?
At any stage should you feel that you want to stop taking part in the study, you are free to stop and take no further part. There are no consequences for changing your mind about being in the study.

Contact name and number of Project Investigators:

Principal Investigator: Dr. Lucy Hearne
Supervisor: Tom Geary
Telephone number: 061 202931
Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie
Email address: tom.geary@ul.ie

Researcher:
Donna Curran
UL Email address: 17115914@studentmail.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in the study.

Yours Sincerely,
Donna Curran

This research study has received Ethics Approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSRecNo: ). 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
Appendix D

Volunteer Consent Form (Career Interest Test)

EHSRecNo:

Research Title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

- 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 aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
- I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time.
- I understand that my non participation in this study does not affect my relationship with the career guidance teaching team.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature:_____________________________________

Printed name:_______________________

Signature of Researcher:_________________________

Date:_________________________________________
Appendix E

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Volunteer Consent Form (Focus Group)

EHSRecNo:

Research Title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

- 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 focus group and the data generated from it will be kept confidential.
- I am aware that only volunteers who agree to be audio recorded will participate in the study.
- I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
- I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.
- I understand that my non-participation in this study does not affect my relationship with the career guidance teaching team.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature:_____________________________________

Printed name:______________________________

Signature of Researcher:_________________________

Date:_________________________________________
Appendix F

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

Volunteer Consent Form (One-to-one interview)

EHSRecNo:

Research Title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

• 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 only volunteers who agree to be audio recorded will participate in the study.
• I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
• I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.
• I understand that my non participation in this study does not affect my relationship with the career guidance teaching team.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature:_____________________________________

Printed name:__________________________________

Signature of Researcher:________________________

Date:________________________________________
Appendix G

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Confidentiality Agreement for Focus Group Volunteers

EHSRecNo:

**Research Title:** An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

I agree to keep everything that is said in this group confidential.

That means that I can talk about anything that I say or the interviewer says outside of the group BUT I will not talk about anything that was said by any other students in my group.

I agree to keep other people’s opinions and contributions to the group private. If I feel that this is something I cannot agree to, then I should reconsider my participation in the group and notify the researcher [insert name] that I will be no longer taking part.

I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I don’t feel comfortable answering and that I can decide at any stage that I don’t want to take part anymore.

I agree [ ] I don’t agree [ ]

Participant Name: ……………………… Participant Signature:…………………………

Researcher’s Signature: ……………………………………………………………………………

Date: ……………………………………………………………………………………………
Appendix H

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Parent/Carer/Guardian Information Letter

EHSRecNo:

Research Title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

Dear Parent/Carer/Guardian,

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 Tom Geary. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to investigate the topic of using career interest tools, and their relevance for students entering senior cycle when making subject choice decisions and career exploration. I am writing to you to enquire whether you would be willing to consent to your son/daughter taking part in a research study in the school through completing a career interest inventory using www.careersportal.ie. This will take approximately 15 minutes during a careers class.

This will be followed up with student focus group with a sample of students (n12) who complete the online career interest inventory. The focus group will take approximately one hour and will be audio-taped. It should be noted that as focus groups are conducted within a
group setting, each participant’s contributions will be heard by the other participants within the group. However, each student will be asked to sign an agreement to keep all opinions expressed during the focus group interview private.

After the focus group, 6 of the students from the focus group will be asked to participate in a follow up one-to-one interview, approximately 30 minutes in length. This will also be audio-tape recorded. These interviews will take place at lunch time in a private office in the school.

The recordings will have any names or identifiers removed, will be stored in a secure location or on a password protected computer in UL, and the information will be stored for seven years. It will then be safely destroyed.

Participation in the study is voluntary and students can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis phase. Should a student withdraw after the focus group or interview has begun their contribution will be removed. If you have any queries or require any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Donna Curran
UL Email address: 17115914@studentmail.ul.ie

Supervisor: Tom Geary
Email address: tom.geary@ul.ie

Research P. I.: Dr. Lucy Hearne
Telephone number: 061 202931
Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

If you are agreeable to your son/daughter participating in this research study please confirm your consent by completing the attached Consent Forms and returning it by [insert date] to me at School. A signed copy of this form must be received in advance of the day of the focus group in order for your son/daughter to participate.
Yours Sincerely,
Donna Curran.

This research study has received Ethics Approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSRecNo: ). 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 I

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form (Career Interest Test)

Date:

EHSRecNo:

Research Title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research study. I understand that the following conditions are designed to protect the privacy of all participants and to respect their contributions.

(i) Participation is entirely voluntary. Even if I consent to my child taking part, he/she still has the right to refuse to take part.
(ii) All participants are free to withdraw at any time.
(iii) The Career Interest data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research team.
(iv) While findings from the Career Interest Assessment data may be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will any names of students or the school, nor any identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I hereby consent to my son/daughter taking part in this research study in the form of a Career Interest Assessment.

Parent/Guardian Name: …………………………………………………………………

Students Name and School Year: ………………………………………………………..

Parent/Guardian Signature: ……………………………………………………………..

Researcher’s Signature: ………………………………………………………………………Date: ………..
Appendix J

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form (Focus Group)

EHSRecNo:

Research Title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research study. I understand that the following conditions are designed to protect the privacy of all participants and to respect their contributions.

(i) Participation is entirely voluntary. Even if I consent to my child taking part, he/she still has the right to refuse to take part.

(ii) All participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process prior to data analysis of the focus group.

(iii) The focus group data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research team. Contributions during the focus group, however, will be heard by all other participants in the group.

(iv) While excerpts from the focus group data may be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will any names of students or the school, nor any identifying characteristics be included in this report.

(v) The collected data will be stored in the P.I.’s office in the University of Limerick for seven years.

I hereby consent to my son/daughter taking part in this research study in the form of a Focus Group.

Parent/Guardian Name: ………………………………………………………………….

Students Name and School Year:………………………………………………………..

Parent/Guardian Signature:……………………………………………………………..

Researcher’s Signature……………………………………………………Date:………
Appendix K

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form (One-to-one interview)

EHSRecNo:

**Research Title:** An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

I have read the Subject Information Letter and understand in detail the particulars of the research study. I understand that the following conditions are designed to protect the privacy of all participants and to respect their contributions.

(i) Participation is entirely voluntary. Even if I consent to my child taking part, he/she still has the right to refuse to take part.

(ii) All participants are free to withdraw at any time in the process prior to data analysis of the interview.

(iii) The interview data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research team.

(iv) While excerpts from the interview data may be made part of the final research report, under no circumstances will any names of students or the school, nor any identifying characteristics be included in this report.

(v) The collected data will be stored in the P.I.’s office in the University of Limerick for seven years.

I hereby consent to my son/daughter taking part in this research study in the form of an Interview.

Parent/Guardian Name: ..........................................................

Students Name and School Year: ..........................................................

Parent/Guardian Signature: ..........................................................

Researcher’s Signature..........................................................Date:............
Gatekeeper Information Letter Careers Portal

Date:

EHSRecNo:

Research title: An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration

Dear Sir/Madam,

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 Tom Geary. I am undertaking a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling as part of my studies.

In my research I aim to investigate the topic of using career interest tools, and their relevance for students entering senior cycle when making subject choice decisions. In order to gather this information, I would appreciate if you would give me consent to use the Career Interest Assessment on www.careersportal.ie as part of my data collection process. It will be administered to a Transition Year class group of approximately 26 students.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can
withdraw from the research at any time prior to 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 the name of the website and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the website will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

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

Researcher: Donna Curran
UL Email address: 17115914@studentmail.ul.ie

Research Supervisor: Tom Geary
Email address: Tom.Geary@ul.ie

Research P. I.: Dr. Lucy Hearne
Telephone number: 061 202931
Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

Yours Sincerely,
Donna Curran

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EHSRecNo: ). 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
The Topic Guide for Focus Group

1. Establish ground rules
2. To what extent do you see the exploration of career interests as being valuable?
3. To what extent do you see the value in exploring career interests for maintaining a balanced lifestyle?
4. Having completed the Career Interest Assessment, to what degree do you think it is relevant in supporting your career decision-making?
5. What are the strengths of the Career Interest Assessment?
6. Do you think there are limitations to the Career Interest Assessment?
7. At what stage do you think the Career Interest Assessment should be used during Transition Year?
8. What expectations do you place on your current interests shaping your future career?
9. What other interventions do you find useful when making your subject choice decisions for senior cycle?
Appendix N

EHSRecNo:

Questions for Interview:

Contract

**Personal Interests**

1. What areas of sport, culture, art, music and other past-times or hobbies are you interested in?
2. How long have these areas been of interest to you?
3. Would working with other people influence your decision to work in a particular area/career?
4. What expectations do you place on your current interests determining your future career?

**Subject Choice**

5. To what extent do you feel completing the TY programme has contributed to you making your subject choice for senior cycle? (Useful interventions?)
6. Did you consider your future career possibilities when making your subject choice decisions?
7. To what extent do you feel that completing the online career interest assessment prepared you for subject choice?
Career Exploration

8. Do you feel that completing the online interest assessment helped or hindered career exploration?

9. Feedback from the focus group suggested that students in TY should be offered a one-to-one career appointment. To what extent would you see the importance of completing a career’s learning programme in preparation for this appointment?

10. To what extent do you think that current labour market needs and job availabilities will influence your career decision-making?

11. There was a suggestion during the focus group to use the Career Interest assessment at the beginning and again at the end of the year to compare if someone’s interests have changed over the course of the year in TY. Would you feel it is important to evaluate interests over time?

12. Is the career decision-making process one that concerns you?
Acceptance of the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines

I have read the University of Limerick Child Protection Guidelines and agree to abide by its contents. There is no reason why I would be considered unsuitable to work with children or young people.

Signature: _______________________________ Date: ____________

Print Name: ______________________________

Department: ______________________________

This form must be retained by the signatory’s University Department
Appendix P

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

EHSRecNo:

Questions asked in Online Careers Interest Test

Would you prefer:

1. To build something with wood or metal or sort out your books or music so they are easy to find.

2. To work with a landscape artist in building a newly designed public park or organise an event down to the last detail

3. To use a high precision tool in an engineering depot or manage a business or group of people

4. To use a word processor to edit and format documents or seek new ways to promote a product

5. To study something in depth or use debating skills to present your views

6. To help a small office become more organised by designing a better filing system or visit and chat with old people at a day center

7. To drive a van to deliver goods or create special effects for a computer game

8. To monitor a machine on an assembly line or use logic to examine a hypothesis

9. To look after animals in a pet shop or give advice on the wording of jingles used for advertising

10. To work the land to improve productivity or work with a band/group on a musical performance
11. To develop better ways to predict something, e.g. the weather, or human behaviour or paint a portrait of someone

12. To work with a security firm or help a survivor of a crash with their fears

13. To use statistical methods to analyse research data or work with patients in a clinic or hospital

14. To be editor or a popular magazine or help people with personal or emotional problems

15. To propose a design for a new restaurant or sell things on eBay

16. To act in a play or talk and comfort someone whose relative has died

17. To investigate crimes or start your own business

18. To take charge of the administration of a new project or write a song

19. To invest money in the stock market or listen carefully to hear all sides of an argument

20. To work on the construction of a new industrial plant or give a public speech on a topic that motivates you

21. To write a documentary for TV or persuade people to join a club or team

22. To analyse air quality for pollutants or work with accountants in preparing the yearly budget for a company

23. To learn to play or practice a musical instrument or use a computer program to run the accounts of a business

24. To create a menu for a new modern multi-cultural restaurant or spend time trying to make new friends

25. To plant and grow seeds in a garden centre or use a mathematical formula to assist in a research project

26. To design a set for a play or read good literature

27. To assemble electronic components or care for and feed animals in a zoo or farm

28. To set up a fish farm or food processing plant or be responsible for selecting people for a team or group activity

29. To operate machines or tools or work on a computer updating records
30. To use machinery to prepare and manage the land or organise all the details of a club outing

31. To be involved in building a challenging engineering structure or make risky decisions

32. To set up and manage an information center or plan new ways to make money

33. To create an experiment to test a theory or write a review of a book

34. To take notes or minutes at a meeting or help restore confidence in people with low self-confidence

35. Do physically active work outdoors or design the cover of a new book or magazine using design software

36. To make something useful for your bedroom or investigate the effectiveness of a new healthcare product

37. To explore new ways of treating commercial waste material or study the structure of language

38. To create your own special dish for an important occasion or explore different styles of music across the world

39. To solve problems by applying logical principles or create a film from a script you like

40. To lay cables for the installation of telecommunications equipment or help solve interpersonal problems

41. To use mathematical modelling as part of your research or assist someone understand something they are having difficulty with

42. To write a brochure promoting a new bookshop or look after young children at a summer camp

43. To work on the interior design of a restored mansion or sell computer equipment

44. To dance or perform on stage with a theatre group or teach people a subject you are good at

45. To collect, study and classify something scientifically or direct the financial resources of a business

46. To make appointments and manage the diary of a small business owner or rewrite an article to appeal to a younger/older audience
47. To search the internet or newspapers for second hand bargains or work to help people overcome disagreements

48. To undertake routine servicing of machinery or write a technical book on a subject you are involved in

49. To be responsible for the editorial style of a publication or work out a plan to help generate funds for a cause you support

50. To investigate new uses for a common chemical compound or proof read documents before printing

51. To propose a design for a new restaurant or prepare trial balances or audit accounts for a restaurant

52. To work on the classification of information in a topic you know well or help disabled people improve their daily living skills

53. To care for and maintain a new forest plantation or examine material under a microscope

54. To work on animations for a web based advertisement campaign or write a short story

55. To modify equipment to improve performance or work with lost animals in a cats and dogs home

56. To choose the layout of plants in a botanical garden or manage people by getting them to do things
Appendix Q

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Ethical Approval

From: Anne.O'Brien
Sent: 28 March 2019 13:50
To: Lucy.Hearne
Subject: RE: 2019_03_19_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: 2019_03_19_EHS An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for future Career Exploration
Principal Investigator: Lucy Hearne
Other Investigators: Tom Geary, Donna Curran.
Recommendation: Approved until October 2019.

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
Appendix R

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

Additional Ethical Approval to include Interview Schedule

From: Anne.O'Brien
Sent: 09 May 2019 13:08
To: Lucy.Hearne
Subject: 2019_03_19_EHS - Chair's Decision - May 2019

Dear Lucy,

Thank you for your 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: 2019_03_19_EHS - An Investigation of the Relevance of using a Career Interest Instrument with Transition Year Students in the Decision-Making Process for Future Career Exploration
Principal Investigator: Lucy Hearne
Other Investigators: Tom Geary, Donna Curran.
Recommendation: EBSREC approve the addition of interview schedule as provided. This research study has ethical approval until October 2019.

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