



**Circular: 0001/2025**

# **To: The Managerial Authorities and Principals of Recognised Post-Primary Schools**

## **Guidance in Post-Primary Schools**

(updating circular 0041/2024)

### **1. Introduction**

[Section 9\(c\)](#) of The Education Act (1998) states that a school shall use its available resources to “ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices”. This circular provides information to managerial authorities and principals in relation to whole-school guidance (WSG) as the appropriate model of practice in contemporary post-primary schools.

This circular is written in the context of [the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance](#) and accompanying [Strategic Action Plan \(2024-2030\)](#). Within the framework, four pillars and eight objectives underpin a clear vision for lifelong guidance in Ireland. This circular provides a foundation for the application of the concepts outlined in the framework, to support and strengthen guidance planning and practice within the post-primary sector.

### **2. Purpose of this circular**

The purpose of this circular is to provide post-primary schools with information to support well-informed implementation of WSG planning and practice, in the context of evolutions in policy relating to lifelong guidance, Junior Cycle reform, redevelopment of Senior Cycle and publication of the [Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice](#). This circular integrates and centralises policy relating to guidance in post-primary schools.

### **3. Whole-school guidance (WSG)**

Guidance is, by definition, person-centred and holistic. It supports an individual’s personal and social, educational and career development: guidance facilitates and empowers individuals to make informed decisions and life choices. In post-primary schools, guidance plays a significant role in supporting students’ well-being and contributes to building internal and external resilience.

WSG is the contemporary model for guidance in post-primary schools. WSG means that all school personnel (including but not limited to the guidance counsellors) have an important role and responsibility to support students with their personal, social, educational and career choices. WSG supports the implementation of a large and



varied range of activities and learning experiences provided to students in a progressive, developmental sequence.

A WSG programme is a clear and defined list of activities and learning experiences that are provided by school personnel (including but not limited to the guidance counsellor) to all students. The WSG programme is provided in order to meet the identified guidance needs of the school community (parents/guardians/carers and students). The WSG programme provides a range of activities and learning experiences, through one-to-one appointments, group work, classroom guidance, units of learning, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. As the guidance needs of each school community will vary, WSG programmes will vary from school to school.

Each school should have a WSG plan in place. A WSG plan outlines a school's approach to WSG, and includes a detailed WSG programme. Further information and support for schools with developing their WSG plans is detailed in [Information Note 0001/2024](#), which provides clear and practical examples.

WSG activities and learning experiences should be based on the needs of the school community. WSG is planned for and implemented by a nominated WSG team, within which, the guidance counsellor plays a specialised role. WSG is the responsibility of the entire school community as outlined. The Board of Management and school management team have a responsibility to ensure that the provision and practice of guidance in the school is of the highest possible standard.

#### **4. Guidance counsellors**

Post-primary guidance counsellors hold a [dual qualification](#). They hold Teaching Council Route 2 registration and an [appropriate qualification](#) in guidance counselling. While the role of the guidance counsellor can vary from school to school, an outline of activities generally undertaken by the guidance counsellor are outlined in the [Programme Recognition Framework document \(2016\)](#). Guidance counsellors have specialist knowledge and training to support the personal/social development, educational development and career development of students with regard to WSG provision.

A guidance counsellor will undertake work with students in the classroom, in groups and through one-to-one sessions, as appropriate. A balanced approach to time management on behalf of the guidance counsellor will ensure that all guidance needs of students (personal, social, educational and careers) are met as effectively as possible. In general, one-third of a guidance counsellor's allocated time will be spent teaching classroom guidance while two-thirds will be made available for group work, one-to-one sessions and other components involved in the role such as attending student-support-team meetings. Guidance counsellors are core members of a school's student-support team.



## 5. Student and parent guidance needs

As noted in point 3 above, a WSG plan prescribes the WSG activities and learning experiences for all students in a school in a given academic year. It is evaluated, reviewed and updated annually. In creating a WSG plan, the identified needs of students and parents/guardians/carers are incorporated. This is a data-informed approach to planning, which can be facilitated in many ways: a group of students may be surveyed for example, or reflective focus groups with parents/guardians/carers/students could be organised.

A continuum of support ([guidance for all, for some and for a few](#)) based on students' needs is anticipated in advance of each academic year and reflected in the WSG plan. Groups of students, individual students and parents/guardians/carers may have unique circumstances and requirements requiring particular support. Focusing on the disclosed needs of students and parents/guardians/carers on personal/social/education and career guidance can lead to innovation and efficiency within planning.

An inclusive approach, again based on a continuum of support (guidance for all, for some and for a few), allows for an effective and efficient deployment of resources to meet the diverse guidance needs of the school community. A focus on a universally designed WSG programme will maximise inclusion and provide targeted support for those in need, ensuring that appropriate guidance is accessible for students and parents/guardians/carers.

## 6. Career-management skills, employer engagement and pathways

As outlined in the [National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance \(2024-2030\)](#), a focus on career-management skills and lifelong career mobility will instill the language of skills development and a sense of agency and empowerment in students, as they engage with their post-primary education.

There are many opportunities within the formal, extra-curricular and co-curricular programmes whereby engagement with employers may be possible for post-primary students. Exposure to the world of work and reflections on learnings can maximise experiential learning and informed educational and career choices and can be initiated and developed as part of WSG.

Additionally, parity of esteem for the variety and broadening availability of pathways after post-primary education could be introduced early in a students' Junior Cycle experience. [Circular 0009/2023](#) provides schools with guidelines as to how personal, social, educational and career guidance can be incorporated into the programme of learning at Junior Cycle.

TY programmes are currently under review in line with senior cycle redevelopment. In line with this review, a school's WSG plan should integrate pertinent aspects of the [TY Programme Statement](#). This includes, but is not limited to the '*career exploration*' dimension, which should be reviewed by WSG-teams and integrated into WSG plans and programmes in time for activation, beginning academic year 2025-26.

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## 7. Allocation for guidance

The allocation for guidance is outlined in detail in Appendix 3 of circulars [0008](#), [0009](#) and [0010/2024](#). Within these documents, it is noted that the WSG plan should demonstrate an appropriate balance between the time provided for individual student appointments, the provision of guidance lessons/modules, and other guidance-related activities.

The National Strategic Action Plan for Lifelong Guidance includes an action, that the Department of Education will consider the effectiveness of the guidance-allocation model in post-primary schools with a view to strengthening the quality of guidance-counselling services.

## 8. Effective Whole-School Guidance (WSG)

### Effective WSG

- encompasses the three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance and;
- refers to a range of learning experiences provided through a WSG approach, that assists students to develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives.

### Characteristics of an effective WSG programme

An effective WSG programme of activities or learning experiences which are delivered by all school personnel throughout the academic year. As noted, a WSG programme provides a range of learning experience through one-to-one guidance appointments, group work, classroom guidance, units of learning, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

An effective model of WSG in post-primary schools includes:

- provision of opportunities for students to engage with all three aspects of guidance through a variety of guidance-related activities, provided in a developmental sequence;
- provision of opportunities for students to engage in a variety of guidance-related activities throughout every year of their post-primary education, in line with their developmental stage;
- provision of guidance activities through a WSG approach which is led by a WSG team (within which, the guidance counsellor plays a specialised and pivotal role);
- an appropriate allocation of time provided to guidance counsellors to engage with students through one-to-one sessions, groups, and classroom guidance;

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- accessibility on behalf of the guidance counsellor, to engage with students through one-to-one sessions, groups and classroom guidance i.e. guidance counsellor has access to students;
- accessibility on behalf of students who have access to classroom, group and one-to-one whole school guidance;
- engagement by members of the whole-school community, as appropriate, at key points during the academic calendar to meet the guidance needs of students e.g. during Careers Week, mock interviews etc. and encouraging all teachers and subject departments to develop WSG learning opportunities in their subjects and;
- balance, whereby students have access to support in all areas of guidance (educational, career, personal and social) through a variety of means provided by the guidance counsellor and other pertinent personnel (one-to-one meetings, in groups and through classroom teaching).

## **9. Counselling Supervision: Professional Support Programme For Guidance Counsellors in Post-Primary School, PLC and CFE settings**

As noted in this circular, in staffing circulars (0008, 0009 and 0010 of 2024) and in Information Note [0008/2023](#), the utilisation of counselling skills within a guidance context is a key part of the school-guidance programme. It may be offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental-learning process, at moments of personal crisis and at key transition points.

Guidance counsellors may work with students on a wide range of developmental issues as a core member of the student-support team. Guidance counsellors are trained to respond appropriately to situations along a broad continuum and refer students on to other support services and agencies as appropriate, particularly with regard to [child-protection policies](#).

In order to support guidance counsellors with this work, the Department of Education funds a series of five sessions of supervision support, for guidance counsellors each academic year. Participation is open to all appropriately qualified guidance counsellors who are employed in post-primary school settings and PLC/CFEs.

Attendance of guidance counsellors at their five allocated supervision sessions is imperative. Supervision, through this Department-funded programme, is considered as an essential professional support to guidance counsellors. The benefits of engaging in supervision are multifaceted and numerous both for the guidance counsellor and also for the whole school community.

The five annual supervision sessions are scheduled well in advance of the afternoon they are taking place. Ideally, guidance counsellors would not be timetabled for classes on the afternoon of their supervision day, so as to prevent any challenge with attending supervision. However, it is vitally important that guidance counsellors would be

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released from their school on the designated afternoon to attend the five supervision sessions during each academic year, as a priority task. Attendance at these two-hour sessions is considered by the Department to be part of the guidance counsellors' allocated hours of work, in the five afternoons of the year where they are scheduled to attend supervision sessions.

A certificate of attendance, outlining the dates that the guidance counsellor was present at supervision, is provided to all attendees at the end of each academic year. Principals should seek a copy from the guidance counsellor at the end of the academic year and retain this as part of the relevant guidance-counsellor's records. These certificates should also be retained by the attending guidance counsellor, as they may be requested as part of an inspection.

## 10. Language and consistent terminology

A key recommendation from the National Consultation on a Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance ([DE, 2023](#)) is that of the promotion and correct use of key terms in language relating to guidance.

**Guidance** is holistic by definition. It involves integrating the personal and social development of the individual into any education and career development, and planning for informed and meaningful decisions. In schools, **whole-school guidance (WSG)** is provided by all personnel as outlined above. Interactions with year heads, subject teachers and all school personnel can support students with their personal/social, educational and career choices.

**Guidance counselling** in schools is a specialised guidance service, provided by the guidance counsellor only. It aligns with the guidance counsellors NFQ level 8/9 training in all areas relating to guidance (educational, career, personal and social). Guidance counselling, and counselling in a guidance context, are interlinked but different by definition. Guidance counselling refers to the role of the guidance counsellor, and the work undertaken by the guidance counsellor with students/parents in all aspects of guidance (educational, career, person and social). A definition of counselling in a guidance context is outlined below.

**Counselling in a guidance context** involves the utilisation of guidance-counselling skills to support a student with personal/social developmental issues. It is important to differentiate between the competencies of a guidance counsellor in relation to counselling in a guidance context (outlined in the [Programme Recognition Framework: Guidance Counselling](#)) and the level of difference in training and qualifications of a psychotherapist/clinical psychologist, for example. Due to their training, guidance counsellors have a clear understanding of the boundaries of their roles and in particular, a strong capacity to hold the boundaries between guidance counselling and

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therapeutic counselling. Further information on personal and social guidance counselling is provided in the associated [Information Note 0008/2023](#).

## **11. Circular on guidance**

This circular will be reviewed regularly and updated in line with progress made under the strategic action plan for lifelong guidance.

Please bring this circular to the attention of the guidance team, guidance counsellors, all members of the school community and the board of management.

**Evelyn O' Connor,**  
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**January 2025**