

A Quality Framework for School Counselling

Competencies, Job Description, Referral Protocol & Evaluation Framework

Developed for Co-operation Fingal
By **Caroline Lambden**

Contents

	page
1. Introduction	1
2. Standards for the School Counselling Programme	2
3. Professional Qualifications and competency standards.....	5
4. Job responsibilities of the School Counsellor	7
5. National context for provision for counselling in schools	9
6. Guide to Professional Qualifications and rates of pay	10
7. Evaluation Framework.....	12
Appendix 1: Overview of Guidance Counselling Services.....	15

1. Introduction

Changes in demographics, family structures, culture and society are just a few of the issues that have had an impact on the role of schools in today's society. Schools have always been learning environments that have also taken up a pastoral role. However, due to changes in society, and increased demand for professional levels of emotional support, they have had to look at strategies to support social and emotional needs within the school. These emerging strategies are paramount to the schools, given the symbiotic nature of emotional stability, school attendance, and pupil retention.

These emerging strategies are funded from a diverse range of resources, have differing management groups, and operate in a variety of different urban and rural areas. It is for this reason that we have developed a framework for the delivery of best practices, which will act as a resource to new and emerging projects.

The Quality Framework for School Counselling was commissioned by Co-operation Fingal under the auspices of the Dormant Accounts Fund. This document delineates best practices for establishing a comprehensive school counselling programme, and provides direction to schools and partners as they develop standards in the areas of school counsellor competencies, role definition for school counsellors, and the evaluation of school counsellors and school counselling programmes.

The document is based on the Fingal Attendance Monitoring Programme, 2005/7 and illustrates counsellor competencies and evaluation standards.

An overview of mainstream counselling provision in second level Irish schools is provided. A template job description is provided to define appropriate functions and responsibilities of school counsellors. One of the most challenging aspects of counselling is represented by the question: how can you account for its success? Therefore we have tried to establish criteria to illustrate and measure student progression.

The school learning environment gives rise to issues of equity of access, equality of participation, and equality of outcome. As advocates and change agents, counsellors are part of a team of professionals in the learning environment and thereby can influence system-wide changes. Very often they are in good positions to assist the school in analyzing systemic barriers that hinder academic success for all groups of students. These changes impact whole schools as well as individual students and can have a profound impact on student achievement. Therefore, schools and counsellors are encouraged to collaborate with each other in adopting these models in order to set standards for counselling in schools, to develop appropriate school counsellor job descriptions and evaluation procedures, and to implement school counselling models that address the needs of all students.

2. Standards for School Counselling Programmes

To develop a framework for measurement of standards, the school must develop agreed policies for the following areas:

2.1 Philosophy

Standard 1: There is a written statement of the philosophy of the school's counselling programme. A school meeting this standard has a philosophy statement that provides a clear, succinct declaration of the mission of the school counselling programme. The statement of philosophy is complementary to the established philosophy of the school and clearly delineates that the school counselling programme is for all students.

2.2 Goals / Objectives

Standard 2: There is a written statement of the goals / objectives of the school's school counselling programme. The school illustrates a clear, succinct declaration of the general outcomes to which the school counselling programme is committed. The statement of goals is compatible with the school counselling programme's statement of philosophy.

2.3 Policies

Standard 3: There is a written statement of the policies and administrative regulations pertaining to the school counselling programme which have been approved by the School's Management. The school meeting this standard has a statement from the Board on policies pertaining specifically to the school counselling programme which are clearly defined and are complementary to other educational programmes and student policies of the school. This will include policies concerning student confidentiality; it will illustrate written policies for student records and ensure these are consistent with school policies and regulations. These policy statements will promote collaboration between boards and sub-groups, and with school personnel, families and community agencies.

2.4 Curriculum

Standard 4: There is a written curriculum of the school counselling programme delivered and/or coordinated by the school counsellor. The school meeting this standard has a school counselling curriculum that is designed to facilitate the systematic delivery of activities to all students and is consistent with the school counselling programme's statements of philosophy, goals, and objectives. There should be evidence that the curriculum is documented in writing and is based on a needs assessment of the school counselling programme's client population.

There should also be evidence that the curriculum indicates the methods and timelines for delivery of programmes including, but not limited to, classroom instruction, small-group discussions, one-to-one work, presentations, and collaborative activities with teachers, staff specialists, parents, and other relevant personnel.

2.5 Referral

Standard 5: While the counselling service should benefit all students through a blanket-bomb approach to the delivery of social and emotional support programmes, it may also have a one-to-one element to its curriculum. For this reason the school should define its practices for student referral

to one-to-one support. The school will engage with academic personnel, parents, and students to decide whether

1. The students will self-select themselves into the service, or
2. They will be identified by key staff and referred through a defined protocol, or
3. A combination of both of the above

Standard 6: In cases where a student requires specialist support outside the service, the school counsellor will become involved in assessing his/her needs and, where necessary, arrange a referral to an appropriate outside agency. Procedures for the referral of students to outside agencies should be included.

2.6 Responsive Services

Standard 7: The procedures, activities, and services of the school counselling programme ensure appropriate and timely response to crisis concerns.

The school meeting this standard has evidence that while school counsellors offer a range of services along a continuum from early intervention to crisis response, the school should also include an agreed protocol illustrating appropriate interventions in response to immediate and/or crisis needs of students. This should be developed by the school in consultation with the counsellor, parents, school personnel, and other identified parties. It will ensure that there are written procedures to be used in crisis situations.

2.7 Systems Support

Standard 8: The school counselling programme is organized, supported, maintained, and managed in a manner conducive to its delivery of services and its continuous improvement. The school meeting this standard has evidence that:

- The school organizational chart delineates clearly the administrative personnel to whom school counsellors are accountable
- The individual who is assigned the responsibility of managing the school counselling programme is allotted sufficient time and adequate opportunity to perform his or her responsibilities
- A current written job description exists which includes requisite qualifications for employment as a school counsellor and specifies school counsellor professional duties and responsibilities
- Adequate facilities and support services are provided to school counsellors, including adequate individual office space, access to phones, sufficient computer and data processing services, and an appropriate private area for small group school counselling activities
- Professional development activities specifically related to school counselling concerns are offered
- There is a specific plan to communicate programme activities and services to all served by the school counselling programme

Standard 9: There are formal methods established for assessing the school counselling programme, the school counsellor competencies, and the satisfaction levels of those persons who are served

directly or indirectly by the school counselling programme. The school meeting this standard has evidence that a planned, systematic evaluation of the school counselling programme is conducted on an ongoing basis to determine the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the programme. The evidence includes a documented plan for evaluating student competencies established in the school counselling programme, a calendar of timely assessments, and written procedures and documentation for assessing client satisfaction. The school counsellor's job description can also form the basis for evaluating individual school counsellors.

3. Person Specification

The following skills and competencies are intended as a guide to the set of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that should be demonstrated by a counsellor working in a school counselling programme.

3.1 Counselling

The school counsellor will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of theory, practice, and ethical standards relative to individual and group counselling
- Articulate the theoretical basis for their own counselling practice
- Demonstrate appropriate counselling techniques and interventions for use within the personal/social domains
- Demonstrate the ability to provide individual and group counselling services that are appropriate to the interests, needs, and developmental level of students
- Demonstrate the ability to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of their counselling interventions and modify accordingly
- Demonstrate the ability to interpret tests, student data, and other appraisal results appropriately in the counselling environment

3.2 Consulting

The school counsellor will:

- Demonstrate the ability to consult and collaborate with teachers, staff, administrators, and community-based organizations in understanding and meeting the needs of all students
- Make appropriate referrals to school and community support personnel

3.3 Coordinating

The school counsellor will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the school and community resources that complement the provision of counselling services
- Initiate and maintain productive working relationships with students, staff, parents, administration, and community-based organizations

3.4 Curriculum Management

The school counsellor will:

- Demonstrate the ability to design and implement a planned, sequential, and developmentally appropriate school counselling strategy
- Demonstrate the ability to deliver the programme using systematic approaches
- Promote understanding and appreciation for diverse populations and cultures
- Demonstrate the ability to evaluate impact
- Demonstrate the ability to modify methods based on feedback and evaluation

3.5 Individual Planning

The school counsellor will:

- Demonstrate the ability to assist students in establishing personal goals and developing future plans
- Articulate a method of systematic delivery of individual planning to all students appropriate to their age and level and within the context of whole school delivery

3.6 Managing

The school counsellor will:

- Manage time, space, materials, and equipment for the provision of the counselling programme
- Conduct periodic evaluations of the counselling programme and report to the school staff
- Use evaluations of the counselling programme to modify programmes and activities

3.7 Professionalism

The school counsellor will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the national standards regarding ethics and counselling skills and practices
- Demonstrate knowledge of the national laws pertinent to the role, function, and services of the counsellor
- Participate in professional development activities

4. Major Job Responsibilities

4.1 Counselling

Following referral by key staff, the counsellor will:

- Provide one-to-one individual planning sessions with students in the area of social / emotional development
- Conduct structured goal-oriented counselling sessions in systematic response to identified needs of groups of students. Themes include social skill development, conflict resolution, goal setting and motivation, family issues, and making healthy choices
- Assist in the transition from primary school to second level
- Interpret student data and other assessment results appropriately in the counselling environment
- Provide individual counselling in response to student requests

4.2 Consulting

- Provide information and skills to parents, school staff, administration, and the community to assist them in helping students in academic, career, and social development
- Take a leadership role in informing a schools counselling strategy in the areas of counselling content into the curriculum, staff development, and parent education programmes
- Assist parents in addressing school related problems and issues. Refer students and their parents, as needed, to appropriate specialists, special programmes and/or outside agencies

4.3 Coordinating

- Advocate for equal access to programmes and services for all students
- Plan and coordinate counselling programmes and other extensions of the counselling curriculum
- Coordinate parent education programmes to assist students in making a smooth transition from primary to second level school

4.4 Curriculum Management

- Design, deliver, evaluate, and revise a planned sequential and developmentally appropriate school counselling curriculum to include lessons in planning and personal / social growth and understanding
- Deliver the curriculum in a systematic manner using diverse strategies and settings
- Facilitate the instructional process in collaboration with school and community resources

4.5 Individual Planning

- Develop systems and strategies within the counselling service which will ensure that the objectives defined by the school are reached

4.6 Managing

- Review the school counselling programme annually and produce a qualitative and quantitative analysis of provision generally
- Plan, implement, maintain, and evaluate the systems necessary for the support, maintenance, and improvement of the school counselling programme
- Manage the preparation of budget, production of printed materials, guides, etc., that support the programme
- Contribute to a programme of public relations
- Articulate the school counselling programme to students, parents, teachers, staff, and community
- Develop and maintain skills needed to utilize technology systems and participate in professional development activities

4.7 School System

- Participate in school decision making and in activities which contribute to the effective operation of the school
- Cooperate and collaborate with other professionals in enhancing the education of students. Communicate with the administrators, teachers and staff, parents, and students as to the role of the school counselling programme in the overall educational process of the school

4.8 Professionalism

- Adhere to ethical standards and preferred practices
- Demonstrate personal growth and professional development

5. National Context for Counselling in Schools

5.1 Irish National Context

Counselling has as its objective the empowerment of students so that they can make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies, and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing. Counselling in schools may include personal counselling, educational counselling, career counselling, or combinations of these. (*'Planning the School Guidance Programme' - National Centre for Guidance in Education: Dublin, 2004*).

In Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance, it states that the

'guidance and counselling process aims to help students to develop an awareness and acceptance of their talents and abilities; to explore possibilities and opportunities; to grow in independence and to take responsibility for themselves; to make informed choices about their lives and to follow through on those choices ... the word guidance is used to describe the activities provided by the guidance and counselling services identified under support services in paragraph 2 of the Education Act 1998'

'Guidance in second-level schools 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. According to Section 9 of the Education Act (1998) a recognised school shall use its available resources to:

- (c) *ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices'*

However it is this definition which pertains to counselling being about educational and occupational choices which the Irish Association for Counselling and Therapy (IACT) does **not** recognise as 'counselling'

'Counselling should be available when necessary, on an individual and/or group basis, to assist students in their personal and social, educational and career development. Guidance counsellors are qualified to provide counselling support to students. The demands for counselling will vary among schools, and within any particular school from year to year, in response to student needs. Schools, therefore, require flexibility in determining the allocation of time for the guidance counsellor/s to engage in counselling. However, schools need to balance the time available to the guidance counsellor/s for individual counselling against their responsibilities to the full student body in the school. It is recommended, therefore, that in cases where students require personal counselling over a protracted period of time, guidance counsellors should refer such cases to relevant outside agencies'.

Much of the success of a school counselling service can be determined from the outset by the school taking the time to analyse needs, identify priority issues, and thereby define appropriate aims and objectives for their counselling service.

6. Guide to Professional Qualifications and rates of pay

Qualifications and standards are issues for the appointment of counsellors. At present there is a series of requirements which are disjointed and relate more specifically to the Guidance Counsellor's role in schools (see Appendix 1); however this falls short of providing competency standards for social / emotional support strategies delivered by the counselling profession as disparate from a guidance counselling model.

The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) does not recognise career counselling and educational counselling as 'counselling'. Therefore the only national guidelines we have to refer to are those proposed for the guidance counsellor, which relate more specifically to career and educational counselling as part of a progression planning process.

6.1 Guide to professional qualifications

In the absence of regulations, we have devised a number of quality standards:-

Case 1 – the qualified counsellor

- a) The counsellor should hold a professional qualification in Counselling approved under the National Qualification Framework of level 6 FETAC or HETAC.
- b) Ideally the counsellor should hold a professional qualification approved under the National Qualification Framework, which complements counselling in the education environment. This qualification will for example take the form of psychotherapy, psychometrics, or education, etc.
- c) The counsellor should have completed 100 hours of supervised counselling preferably as part of a school internship. For the purposes of this supervision, internship is defined as a placement of a candidate in a setting, preferably a school, including continued supplementary seminars or prescribed study under the supervision of the preparing institution.

Case 2 – the student counsellor as part of an internship programme. The internship is defined as a placement of a candidate in a school setting; the internship shall include the counselling of students, and consulting with parents and staff.

- a) The student counsellor must be eligible to hold a professional qualification under the National Qualification Framework qualification
- b) The student counsellor must be under the supervision of the preparing institution while providing counselling in the school as part of their work experience programme in their final year of study
- c) Ideally the student counsellor is eligible to hold a professional qualification approved under the National Qualification Framework, which complements counselling in the education environment. This qualification will for example take the form of psychotherapy, psychometrics, or education, etc.

6.2 Pay Rates for Qualified Counsellors

Pay rates for qualified counsellors vary widely depending on employer and experience. However for the purposes of this exercise we have taken the guide from the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP). Their recommendation is an approximate figure of €25.00 - €50.00 per session. A qualified and experienced counsellor may earn in the range of €45,000 - €60,000 a year. Top earners may make in excess of €77,500 a year.¹

¹ www.careerdirections.ie

7. Evaluation Framework

All professionals value the opinions of others as to their perceptions of how well they do their jobs. We may or may not agree with the evaluator's opinions, but they make an impact upon our actions. Involvement in the evaluation process lets counsellors know that they are part of a whole school development planning and review process, which aims to deliver quality standards and equality of opportunity to all students. The more relevant data we can collate, the better chance we have of delivering a quality service which can contribute in a positive way to both students and a school planning process. This process includes counsellors in the core of the school and will maximize their input and the prioritisation of the service.

The evaluation format and process should flow from the school counsellor job description, which was developed to deliver and meet the requirements of a school counselling model. The models proposed here provide a format that may be followed to conduct an evaluation of school counsellors in a comprehensive and appropriate manner.

7.1 Annual Goal Setting

Line manager shall meet with each counsellor by early September to set goals for the year.

- Goals should be mutually agreed upon
- An interim progress report will be due from the Counsellor by January 1st
- A final report on goal attainment is due by the end of last term

7.2 Formal Observation

Line managers should agree with counsellors their supervision requirements

- Agree the number of counsellor supervision hours to be carried out by an agreed counsellor with supervision capacity

7.3. Summary Evaluation

Using the following lists of indicators as a guide, the line manager will cite areas of particular strength, as well as those areas in need of improvement:

7.3.1 Counselling

The counsellor:

- Assists students in developing decision-making skills
- Demonstrates a holistic knowledge of family and family life
- Employs a holistic knowledge of career development
- Makes appropriate student referrals / sign posts to support services
- Demonstrates the ability to provide individual counselling to targeted students
- Demonstrates ability to initiate counselling relationships with students
- Creates a counselling environment which fosters feelings of acceptance and empathy
- Demonstrates sensitivity to multicultural and multiethnic issues in counselling

- Demonstrates ability to develop and deliver group counselling programmes
- Assists with the transition from primary school to second level school
- Provides interventions and support in crisis situations;

7.3.2 Consulting

(delivered within the school's parameters of the confidentiality code)

The counsellor:

- Provides counselling perspectives and relevant information to the school
- Shares appropriate general information related to family development and family life
- Shares background information pertinent to student performance
- Shares information pertinent to available community resources
- Provides counselling perspective in the development of school initiatives
- Employs mediation skills with the school
- Plans and delivers parent programmes

7.3.4 Coordinating

The counsellor:

- Coordinates the services and activities of the school counselling programme
- Coordinates community resources related to the services and activities of the school counselling programme
- Develops cooperative working relationships between the school and community agencies
- Initiates communication between the school counselling and home
- Facilitates the integration of the counselling service with the career and vocational guidance service of students
- Collaborates with members of staff to maximize the academic experience for students
- Serves as liaison among students, parents, teachers and school support personnel

7.3.5 Managing the Curriculum

The counsellor:

- Demonstrates knowledge of school counselling topics
- Designs, evaluates, and revises a planned sequential and developmentally appropriate school counselling curriculum
- Employs a variety of strategies to achieve objectives in the delivery of the curriculum
- Promotes a positive learning environment
- Facilitates the process by using school and community resources
- Designs procedures to measure student outcomes
- Collaborate with teachers in the delivery of the school counselling curriculum

7.3.6 Managing

The counsellor:

- Manages time, space, materials, and equipment for the provision of the school counselling programme
- Implements and evaluates a developmental school counselling programme
- Organizes the public relations programme of the school counselling programme
- Conducts evaluations of the school counselling programme and interprets the results to the school and community
- Uses evaluations to modify the school counselling programme
- Plans, implements, maintains, and evaluates the systems necessary for the support and maintenance of the school counselling programme
- Uses applied research to modify the programme
- Manages the collection, use, retention, and destruction of educational records in accordance with school policies
- Articulates the school counselling programme to students, parents and staff

7.3.7 Contributing

The counsellor:

- Participates in activities which contribute to the effective operation of the school
- Establishes and maintains effective relationships with staff and administrators
- Communicates with staff, students, parents, and the community regarding the school counselling programme
- Participates in school-wide decision making
- Is active on school committees

7.3.8 Promoting Professionalism

The counsellor:

- Adheres to the ethical standards of the school and those defined at a national level
- Advocates for equal access to programmes and services for all students
- Demonstrates knowledge of current practices in the field of school counselling
- Clarifies limits of confidentiality to students

Appendix 1

OVERVIEW OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLING SERVICES

	GUIDANCE SERVICE	ACTIVITIES	CLIENTS	ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL	PROVIDED BY	TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS
1.	Guidance and Counselling in post-primary schools	Personal and social, educational and career guidance. Guidance delivered through modules on TYP, LCA, LCVP by subject teachers under supervision of the guidance counsellor	Age 12/13-18: pupils attending post-primary schools	Department of Education and Science (DES)	Guidance Counsellor Subject teachers	Guidance Counsellor - Degree + teaching qualification + Recognised Guidance Qualification (see overleaf)
2.	Careers Advisory Services in third-level institutions	Career and educational guidance – concentration on further educational and employment opportunities	Majority aged 18/19-22: students attending most major third-level institutions	Universities and Colleges	Careers & Appointments Officer / Adviser	Degree + various
3.	Adult Educational Guidance Initiative	Educational and career guidance	Literacy, VTOS and Community Education participants	Department of Education and Science (support, training and evaluation role: NCGE)	Guidance Counsellor/ Information Officer	Guidance Counsellor Degree + Recognised Guidance Qualification (see overleaf)
4.	Youth Information Service	Information and referral	Age 15-25	Local voluntary agencies	Youth Information Officer	Various
5.	National Employment Service	Career guidance with emphasis on placement and training	Aged 15+, Long-term unemployed, jobseekers, persons with disabilities, asylum seekers eligible to work	National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS)	Employment Services Officer / Mediator	Diploma/Certificate in Guidance and Counselling and various
6.	Employment Support Service	Information and referral	Unemployed	DSCFA ²	Social Welfare Staff	Various
7.	Unemployment resource centres	Information, counselling and advice	Aged 18+: unemployed	Irish Congress of Trade Unions	Information Officer	Various
8.	Private guidance agencies	Personal and social, educational and career guidance	All ages	Private	Psychologist / Guidance Counsellor	Degree and Masters in Psychology, Guidance qualifications, various

² DSFA – Department of Social and Family Affairs

Bibliography

- NCGE, (2004) *'Planning the School Guidance Programme'* - National Centre for Guidance in Education: Dublin
- www.careerdirections.ie