The Institute of Guidance Counsellors, the professional body for guidance counsellors in Ireland welcomes this opportunity to come before the Joint Committee on Jobs, Social Protection and Education to discuss the future of guidance counselling in secondary schools and colleges of further education.

The Institute believes the changes made to the provision for guidance and counselling in Budget 2011 will have major detrimental implications for students in second level schools and colleges of further education. The Minister for Education and Skills Mr. Ruairi Quinn’s announcement that the ex-quota allocation for guidance would in future be taken from within a school’s general allocation of staffing puts the delivery of this vital frontline service in jeopardy, and will result in a lack of uniformity and standards across the sector. Access to social and personal, vocational and educational guidance provided by a professionally trained guidance counsellor will be severely curtailed and students from less well-off and disadvantaged backgrounds will be hardest hit.

The ex-quota allocation for guidance and counselling has ensured that all schools could deliver a standard of service in accordance with their allocation. The Guidance and counselling service, since its introduction in the nineteen sixties, has developed and progressed in response to societal and student needs because of the ex-quota position. Schools could ensure a service without competing demands from curricular subjects. The allocation then, was one guidance counsellor to 250 students. This situation changed dramatically in the 1980s when the allocation was reduced to one guidance counsellor to 500 students, but at least the provision maintained its ex quota status. In the 1990’s the allocation improved with the introduction of a schedule of hours based on student enrolment, the Guidance Enhancement Initiative and an extra allocation for DEIS schools. These changes reflected the recognition of the important role that guidance played in promoting retention at second-level, and increasing access and participation in Further and Higher Education. The NDP plan 2000-2006 states that ‘the provision of guidance and counselling in second level schools is vital to enable each pupil to gain the maximum benefit from the education system’.

Young people today live in a complex world, are exposed at a much earlier age to pressures of the adult life and do not have the same familial supports as students in the eighties or sixties. A school for many students is the main source of stability and guidance in their lives. The guidance counsellors plays a central role in ensuring that the whole school
Guidance Programme, in collaboration with all staff members, is effective in meeting the pastoral care needs of all the students. The increasing identification of mental health issues among young people highlights the particular need for guidance and counselling services within school to respond to individual students in distress. Bringing the guidance and counselling allocation within the quota makes this essential one to one service very difficult if not impossible to achieve.

**What is the value of Guidance and Counselling?**

There is significant international evidence to support the economic, social and political benefits of the service.¹ The research referred to in this paper suggests that the service is not just cost neutral but also provides significant benefits to the economy. Investment of a preventative nature has a critical economic value for participation, motivation, and course completion at further and higher education². Socially the budget decision to cut guidance and counselling services runs contrary to Government social equity goals of ensuring that education and employment opportunities are distributed equitably and that people make maximum use of their talents regardless of their social background, gender or ethnic origin.

As educational and labour market pathways become increasingly complex in nature the demand for guidance and counselling is more critical now than at any time in the past as young people strive to find options appropriate to their interests, aptitudes and abilities and emerging work opportunities. The Institute contends that the decision to bring the guidance allocation within the general school quota will hurt Ireland’s knowledge economy aspirations.

The OECD review of national policies for career information, guidance and counselling services in 14 OECD countries, including Ireland, describes guidance within education systems as having an important role to play in laying the foundations for life long career development, including knowledge and competencies regarding self-awareness, the world of work and making decisions and transitions. It defines guidance services as ‘services that assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers.’³ A summary of international review findings, policy indicators, and commonly agreed principles and values, can be found in reference1.

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¹ Cutting Education Slack-Policy Decisions: Dr. John Mc Carthy, Director, International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy. New Zealand.
² NCCE Staying power: colloquium on increasing retention rates in higher education: NCCE, 2000
How will schools be affected?

The decision to remove the ex-quota allocation for guidance and counselling will result in the loss of 450 posts in second level schools. The guidance and counselling service will bear the brunt of these losses.

The decision to remove the ex quota allocation for guidance and counselling is effectively an increase in the pupil teacher ratio. For the Minister to state the ratio was left at 19/1 is disingenuous. By guidance being absorbed back into the general allocation he has de facto increased the ratio to 19.8/1.

Current Guidance and Counselling Allocation.
Provision for Guidance and Counselling: The DES currently provides ex quota staffing resources for schools set out in Circular PPT 12/05 DES.

1. All schools receive a schedule of hours per 100 students enrolled e.g, a school with an enrolment of 500-599 receives an allocation of 24 hours per week There are different schedules for schools fully supported by the state and fee paying schools.

2. Some schools received an extra allocation under the Guidance Enhancement Initiative. (This extra allocation is adjusted in line with the schedule set out in Circular PPT 12/05)

3. DEIS.
 Schools designated disadvantaged receive an additional allocation of hours for guidance purposes to tackle educational disadvantage.

Future Guidance and Counselling Allocation: Post Budget

1. The ex-quota allocation of hours is withdrawn.

2. Provision for guidance and counselling must be provided from within the general staff allocation.

Example. A

School of 500 students must now find 24hrs from within its staffing allocation to provide for guidance in addition to providing for all curricular subjects.

Example B.

DEIS school 500 students, must find 27.5 hours from within its staffing allocation to provide for guidance in addition to providing for all curricular subjects. There is no stipulation that the increase in the general teacher pupil allocation to DEIS schools must/should be used for guidance purposes. This shortfall must be found from within the school’s general allocation.
Implications for Staffing

All schools are effectively now over their quota of teachers as the guidance counsellor(s) are now counted as part of their quota.

February 2012 to June 2012.

Any guidance counsellor retiring (to preserve pension entitlements pre Croke Park agreement) will only be replaced until the end of the school year.

September 2012 onward.

- Any guidance counsellor on a fixed term contract will not be replaced due to the fact that the school is over its general allocation.
- Guidance counsellors in permanent positions or on CID’s may be required to fill positions of subject teachers on fixed term contracts who are not re-employed as the school is over quota. Guidance counsellors will be required to teach subjects instead of delivering the guidance service or in addition to providing what must be a reduced service.
- The guidance counsellor may be redeployed to another school depending on subject needs.

Outcomes:

Schools may have no professionally qualified guidance counsellor as of February 2012 and many more may be in this position within a short period of time. Therefore the student’s right of access to appropriate guidance under Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998 is eroded. When schools are in a position to hire again they will have to choose between replacing a subject teacher and a guidance counsellor.

Schools must choose between exam subject provision and guidance provision. Schools must choose between curricular provision and guidance provision. School have been advised to conduct an audit of staff allocation to find hours for guidance provision.

Some options under discussion by management.

- Drop minority subjects.
- Amalgamate minority subjects in senior cycle into one group (combine 5th year and 6th year)
- Increase class sizes to free up staff for guidance.
- Amalgamate honours and pass levels subjects to free up staff for guidance.
- Reduce provision for transition year.
- Drop LCA.
Example school; Enrolment 950 students.

Guidance allocation 2011
Hours per circular PPT 12/05---------- 38 hours
Guidance Enhancement Initiative------ 11 hours
Total---------------------------------49 hours

Guidance allocation as a result of school audit, January 2012; School could only find 10 hours to provide for guidance
2012 ----10 hours.
Guidance deficit. 39 hours.

Concessionary Hours.
Traditionally when a school is over its quota of teachers, it may apply to DES for concessionary replacement hours to fill a subject deficit. This year as a result of the Budget cuts to guidance there will be increased demand for a limited allocation.

Release of 350 Assistant Principal Posts of Responsibility.
The Minister released 350 Assistant Principal Posts of responsibility in the Budget to ensure student supports such as the appointment of year heads. This has erroneously being linked to provision for guidance and counselling. Year Heads fulfil a very different role in student support to guidance counsellors, namely a disciplinary role in relation to schools rules and protocols. They are not trained guidance counsellors to deal with the deeper causes of disaffection among students. Guidance counsellors play a central role in Pastoral Care Teams supporting Year Heads and other members of staff. It should also be noted, not all schools will benefit from these posts nor will all of them be used to appoint year heads.

How will schools meet their statutory obligations under 9 of the Education Act 1998?

--------Which states that a school shall use all its available resources to.......(C) ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices.
The DES Guidelines on 9 (c) cover (i) the aims and importance of guidance and counselling provision,(ii) the planning of a school guidance programme, (iii) elements of the school guidance programme, and (iv) resources and supports for guidance and are intended as a
reference point in identifying minimum standards necessary to provide appropriate guidance. Given the budget decision the guidelines are now just aspirational.

The DES’s own Guidance Inspectorate, research undertaken by ESRI, opinion research by the National Guidance Forum and FORFAS (Expert Group on Future Skill Needs) support the case for more guidance and counselling in schools, the need for more guidance at Junior Cycle, that schools should use their full allocation, more one to one counselling were highlighted in the reports.

Conclusion:

It is the Institute’s belief that equality of opportunity, equality of access and progressive educational policy has been sacrificed by short term economic considerations. This can only lead to the privatisation of the service, available only to those who can afford it. We believe this is too high a price to pay for our young people’s future. The evidence in this presentation supports our contention that the budget decision will have enormous long term educational, social and economic consequences.

Institute of Guidance Counsellors-January 2012.