



# Smarter World, Smarter Work

An Ibec campaign

## Informed choices: career guidance in an uncertain world

September 2018





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# Glossary

*Career education* – whereby students learn about the world of work and develop career management skills through classroom teaching and other activities

*Career information* – on courses and occupations, education and career opportunities, progression routes and choices as well as information on where to find help and advice and how to access it

*Individual career counselling* – on a one-to-one basis whereby specific advice on career decisions is provided pro-actively or reactively and in general or targeted

*Careers guidance counsellors* – qualified teachers with a professional qualification in guidance and counselling, who provide careers education and pastoral care within the school system.

*Careers advisors* – will be trained practitioners with a breadth of knowledge on the education opportunities at further, continuing and third level, as well as an understanding of current and future employment opportunities and labour market information. They are competent in key areas such as psychometric testing and delivering authoritative careers information as part of the specialist careers advisory service.

# Recommendations

How we live, work and develop our careers is being transformed by globalisation, rapid digitalisation and changing lifestyles. To ensure Ireland and its people are ready for the trends that will shape our economic and social future requires a strategic focus by all stakeholders on lifelong career guidance. This will ensure individuals are equipped with the knowledge, skills and agility to make informed choices, engage their talents and reach their full potential.

## **Recommendation 1**

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and stakeholders from education and enterprise should develop a structured National Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance to ensure a coherent career guidance provision is developed for all individuals, at all life stages across Ireland. This strategy should be delivered through a national Careers Guidance Steering Committee.

## **Recommendation 2**

DES should collaborate with enterprise to develop a specialist careers advisory service to supplement current school guidance provision. This service could be supported by the National Training Fund.

## **Recommendation 3**

The careers guidance strategy should define distinct roles and responsibilities for guidance counsellors and careers advisors to instil the complementarity of the roles and signpost where individuals can go for different types of supports.

## **Recommendation 4**

The Careers Guidance Steering Committee should develop multi-channel, innovative and technological solutions including a single web portal, to ensure the guidance service provides advice and support appropriate to all users at a suitable time and place.

## **Recommendation 5**

The responsible groups and agencies (including the Regional Skills Fora, Solas Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the Intreo service) should provide up to date labour market intelligence in a user-friendly, accessible format to inform guidance counsellors, careers advisors, students, parents and jobseekers.

## **Recommendation 6**

The Careers Guidance Steering Committee should oversee the development of a more coherent and professional structure through which employers can engage with schools, higher and further education, to provide support in career planning skills, careers information, role models, careers talks and fairs, and work placements.

# Introduction

Ireland needs a re-imagined national lifelong career guidance provision to ensure that individuals are engaging their talents and fulfilling their potential against the backdrop of an unpredictable and dynamic future.

Appropriate and effective career guidance information and career management skills are necessary to enable individuals to make informed decisions about their abilities, interests, ambitions and future. This would facilitate individuals becoming skilled career decision-makers and encourage them to manage their choices and progression through education, training and employment repeatedly over the course of their lifetimes.

Effective career guidance has the potential to improve the efficiency of the education system, prevent early school leaving, promote a tighter connection between education and work, extend the length of careers, support economic and labour market goals and support social equity and inclusion. It is also a critical support to enable citizens to have rewarding and fulfilled working lives.

Unfortunately, Ireland's current career guidance provision is fragmented and inconsistent and is not meeting the needs of people faced with a changing world of work. This report considers two elements of how this can be addressed:

- 1) a long-term vision for an all-encompassing, fully integrated 'cradle to grave' careers and advisory system, and
- 2) a more immediate and urgent need to support the second level school system through a specialist careers advisory service supported by the National Training Fund.

# The importance of career guidance and education

Effective career guidance and education will contribute to achieving the aims of three recent strategies for education and employment. The *National Skills Strategy: Ireland's Future*<sup>1</sup> posits Ireland as “a place where the talent of our people shines through”, the *Action Plan for Education*<sup>2</sup> aims to make the Irish systems the best in Europe within a decade, while the *Action Plan for Jobs 2018*<sup>3</sup> objectives include “that those entering, re-entering or in the workforce have the incentives and skills needed to prosper”. Each of these strategies rely to some extent on equipping individuals with the capability to navigate through the systems of education and employment, embracing lifelong learning and ensuring their skills remain relevant to the challenges and changes within the labour market.

It is essential that we build on the existing career guidance and education system and deliver a “fit-for-purpose” structure that meets the needs of a 21st century labour market and society. There are a number of reasons why this is the case:

## 1. Change in skills and how we work

Ireland, like many other economies, is going through significant transformation in the workplace. Globalisation, rapid digitalisation, changing lifestyles and new consumer preferences mean jobs and careers are being transformed which will have an impact on the world of education, training and work. Such change brings great opportunities, but also risks. As a result, individuals are being forced to make frequent and complex choices which impact or direct their current and future lives.

Over the last decade new roles have been created for jobs that never existed up to this point and the traditional “factory” or “office” have been transformed. Thirty percent of those in the labour market change their employment status each year while estimates suggest that students currently in the education system will have held an average of 10 to 12 jobs by the time they reach the age of 38<sup>4</sup>. There is a rise in the platform economy and independent work<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore technology, automation, robotics and artificial intelligence are all quickly progressing and

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1. [https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub\\_national\\_skills\\_strategy\\_2025.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf)  
2. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/action-plan-for-education-2018.pdf>  
3. <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Action-Plan-for-Jobs-2018.pdf>  
4. Bureau of Labor Statistics, March 2015; Ibec (2018) *Smarter World Smarter Work*  
5. Deloitte (2014) <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-dttl-2014-millennial-survey-report.pdf>

changing the nature and number of available jobs. Demands for high-skilled workers for non-routine jobs has increased as too has the demand for low-skilled, non-routine jobs such as caring and personal services which are hard to automate<sup>6</sup>. Some suggest<sup>7,8</sup>, that up to 57 percent of global jobs are vulnerable to automation although they also open the opportunity to newer jobs to support such change. On average, by 2020, more than a third of the required key skill sets of most occupations will be comprised of skills not yet considered crucial to the job today<sup>9</sup>. Others<sup>10</sup> note that the current tranche of the most in-demand occupations or specialties did not exist ten or even five years ago, and the pace of change is set to accelerate. This means we cannot know for sure where the jobs of the future will come from or what they will be, but they are likely to include occupations that do not presently exist. Yet that knowledge is not reaching young people, as data from PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2015 found that one-third of young people expected to work in just ten different occupations (including medicine, teaching, law, nursing, veterinary and becoming an athlete) and were not well-aligned with actual labour market needs<sup>11</sup>.

Effective career guidance offers greater return on investment for the economy as skills matches between individuals and occupations are better and so it supports the effective functioning of both education and employment. It may also support better navigation through education, employment, unemployment and return to work, thus avoiding the negative impact that can sometimes occur when these transitions are difficult or go badly. This can create flexibility as individuals develop their capacity to “read and respond”<sup>12</sup> to labour market changes through commitment to lifelong learning and resiliently adapting to the shifting demands of the labour market.

## 2. Ageing population

Demographic patterns are also changing. Ireland’s population has been getting steadily older since the 1980’s<sup>13</sup>. In Census 2016, 37.2% were aged 45 and over, compared with 34.4% in 2011 and 27.6% in 1986. By 2050, the numbers of people aged over 65 will have doubled. Such shifting demographics, longer lifespans and the costs of longevity, demand changes in how long we work. Those entering the workforce today can expect to have a working life spanning over 50 years. The division between work and retirement is also less clear as many transition through semi-retirement, self-employment, short-term contracts or reduced working hours prior to full retirement<sup>14</sup>. As the retirement age increases, the need for lifelong learning and effective career guidance for older workers will emerge.

6. Musset, P and L. Mytna Kurekova (2018), “Working it out: Career Guidance and Employer Engagement”, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 175, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/51c9d18d-en>

7. Technology at Work v2.0: The Future Is Not What It Used to Be,” Citi GPS: Global Perspectives and Solutions, January 2016.

8. [https://www.ncci.com/Articles/Pages/II\\_Insights\\_QEB\\_Impact-Automation-Employment-Q2-2017-Part1.aspx](https://www.ncci.com/Articles/Pages/II_Insights_QEB_Impact-Automation-Employment-Q2-2017-Part1.aspx)

9. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_FOJ\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FOJ_Executive_Summary_Jobs.pdf)

10. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_FOJ\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FOJ_Executive_Summary_Jobs.pdf)

11. Musset, P and L. Mytna Kurekova (2018), “Working it out: Career Guidance and Employer Engagement”, OECD Education Working Papers, No. 175, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/51c9d18d-en>

12. Hooley, T. & Dodd, V. (2015, July) *The Economic Benefits of Career Guidance*. [www.careersengland.org.uk](http://www.careersengland.org.uk)

13. <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2016resultsprofile3-anageprofileofireland/>

14. Humphrey, A., Costigan, P., Pickering, K., Stratford, N., & Barnes, M. (2003). *Factors affecting the labour market participation of older workers*. Dept. for Work and Pensions Research Report No 200. London.

### 3. Equity and social inclusion

Effective career guidance and education can help to level the playing field for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and offer them information regarding education, career paths and related supports that their family and social networks are unable to provide. This could help to challenge traditional social stereotyping and stem intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. Currently many schools for people with disabilities do not have career guidance provision and this impacts the integration of people with disabilities from an early age. Gender stereotyping within our society and its systems directs girls and boys often unconsciously towards particular careers. While girls tend to have higher ambitions, they are focused on fewer career options such as medicine or teaching and tend to avoid fields such as STEM. Greater levels of quality information provision around careers and options can counterbalance these gender differences<sup>15</sup>.

These challenges can be addressed through the delivery of effective career information and guidance systems to ensure individuals have the skills to self-manage their own careers.<sup>16</sup> The ability to make quality, informed choices and decisions about education and careers is key for individuals and has an impact on economic competitiveness and prosperity. These choices are not just made at the point of choosing subjects for school or college or a first career but have to be made repeatedly over an individual's lifetime. Therefore, it is crucial that these skills are learned early and effectively. Failure to hone career management skills leads to trial and error, skills mismatches, individuals dropping out of education and careers, or failing to transition well. These are costly outcomes for individuals, employer and society alike.

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15. Musset, P and L. Mytina Kurekova (2018), "Working it out: Career Guidance and Employer Engagement", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 175, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/51c9d18d-en>

16. OECD (2004). *Career guidance and public policy: Bridging the gap*. Paris: OECD.

# What is career guidance?

Career guidance is defined by the OECD<sup>17</sup> as “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 careers”. The intergovernmental organisation describes career guidance as a connected “family of activities” including:

- *Career education* whereby students learn about the world of work and develop career management skills through classroom teaching and other activities;
- *Career information* on courses and occupations, education and career opportunities, progression routes and choices as well as information on where to find help and advice and how to access it;
- *Individual career counselling* on a one-to-one basis whereby specific advice on career decisions is provided pro-actively or reactively and in general or targeted;
- *Direct contact with the world of work* which gives individuals first-hand insights and experiences into the labour market to inform and broaden career aspirations<sup>18</sup>.

The key objective for Ireland’s career guidance service should be to find effective ways to engage among these “family of activities”. This will help individuals at various stages in their lives to assess their needs, choose knowledgeably, commit to ongoing formal and informal learning, upskilling and reskilling to enhance their competence levels, and manage and develop their careers on an ongoing basis.

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17. OECD (2004). *Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers*. Paris: OECD.

18. *ibid*

# Review of current career guidance system in Ireland

The present careers guidance system in Ireland is fragmented, inconsistently delivered and fails to meet the requirements of individuals in Ireland's rapidly changing economy. This occurs despite the commitment of career guidance professionals, and the efforts made to meet the needs of a diverse population of student and adult learners at different stages of their education and career lifecycle. However, a lack of investment, strategy and connectivity is not serving the needs of the population.

Publicly funded career guidance exists within schools, colleges, universities, further education institutions and within the unemployment service (Intreo). This splits responsibility for provision across at least two government departments: the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, and several agencies.

## Primary level

There is no provision for career guidance in the primary school curriculum. Research<sup>19</sup> concludes that it is important to start to reveal possibilities early, not from the perspective of forcing children to make "premature career choices" but to avoid the "premature closure of future options". There is some engagement with enterprise at primary level which sees children set up "mini-companies" and engage with business for mentoring and encouragement through skills development and role modelling.. However, such programmes are ad hoc rather than in a national framework and may only be available in certain schools.

## Second level

The Education Act (1998) considers post-primary career guidance to be a "universal entitlement" and requires that all "students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their education and career choices" (Section 9 (c)). Research confirms that the development of career management skills in early adolescence contributes to more realistic educational and vocational choices, career success and progress<sup>20</sup>.

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19. <http://www.mreronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/MRERV7I1P31.pdf>

20. [https://www.sowi-online.de/reader/berufsorientierung/what\\_needed.html](https://www.sowi-online.de/reader/berufsorientierung/what_needed.html)

However, Irish secondary schools do not have the necessary resources in-house to deliver appropriate services of this scale; focus mainly on exams, third level access and the completion of CAO forms; and are inadequate in terms of developing career exploration and management skills. Given that, for many students, the post-school options will be initially decided by their performance in State examinations, this is felt to limit the input for guidance counsellors in helping students make career decisions<sup>21</sup>. Third level institutions provide information resources and time for students, and materials for guidance counsellors. However, there is a lack of focus on apprenticeships, PLC or further education and training (FET) options and, overall, a failure to provide easily assimilated information on future employment opportunities. In some instances, inadequate guidance provision can be linked to the high non-progression rates in some third level courses.<sup>22</sup>

ESRI research<sup>23</sup> supports these findings raising issues regarding time constraints for guidance, particularly for personalised one to one discussion, the absence of information on options other than higher education, and the absence of information on transitions to future employment opportunities following on from third level education. The commitment in schools is for 22 hours of guidance counsellor time per week for 500 to 799 students which translates to 6.8 to 10.4 minutes per month for one to one interventions.

The pressure on resources is intensified by the fact that the guidance counsellor is responsible for personal and social guidance, as well as educational and vocational guidance. Pastoral care is obviously a vital service. However, according to the OECD<sup>24</sup>, in this situation the career guidance for the wider student body gets “squeezed by the more immediate and day-to-day personal and study problems” of those experiencing particular difficulties. When school career guidance is provided, it mainly happens in senior cycle, with any time left over being dispersed broadly. Therefore, junior cycle students can miss out on advice on subject choice that has longer term implications for career choices by narrowing later opportunities. International research<sup>25</sup> consistently highlights how students would have found it more valuable and beneficial to have received career guidance at an earlier stage in school.

### Third level

At third level, careers advisory and placement professionals provide careers advisory support to 180,000 students across 26 universities, institutes of technology and higher education institutions. However, students report that employer information is skewed towards larger employers without knowledge or contact with SME's or not for profit sector, while careers advice tends to be very general<sup>26</sup>. In addition, the ability to meet the needs of individuals can vary. For example, PhD students, who may not have the opportunity to remain in academia or wish to transfer into industry, require professional career development and support to be available from an early stage. This requires a specialist approach.

21. <http://www.erc.ie/documents/vol27chp1.pdf>

22. Higher Education Authority (2014) specific reference

23. [www.esri.ie/publications/leaving-school-in-ireland-a-longitudinal-study-of-post-school-transitions/](http://www.esri.ie/publications/leaving-school-in-ireland-a-longitudinal-study-of-post-school-transitions/)

24. <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/34050171.pdf>

25. <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/BKMNEXT195.pdf>

26. [http://www.skillsireland.ie/media/egfsn060711\\_careers\\_labour\\_market.pdf](http://www.skillsireland.ie/media/egfsn060711_careers_labour_market.pdf)

### **Further education and training**

For further education and training, the guidance landscape can be dispersed with the *Adult Educational Guidance Service* available in eight locations nationally. Some locations emphasise services for individuals attending literacy, adult and community education programmes. Others focus more on assisting clients in exploring a return to education or training and in developing their personal work or career progression plan, with priority being given to those who are unemployed.

### **Adult guidance**

For adults, the situation can be even more disjointed, with their needs varying greatly depending on their stage-of-life and their prior or current experiences with education and work. Globally, career guidance services for adults are far less developed than youth services<sup>27</sup>. While services exist if one knows where to look for them, their focus is less about the individual and more on where the individual has entered the system. Adults access different types of guidance depending on the service with which they engage and there is no “one-stop-shop”.

If individuals enter the social welfare system, they are connected with Intreo, which provides advice on employment, training and personal development to help adults enter the workforce, as part of its remit. This is supplemented by other programmes such as the JobPath services, which cater mainly for the longer-term unemployed (over 12 months) and Jobs Clubs. However, it remains unclear at what points and through what service, career guidance is provided at the point of delivery. There is a memorandum of understanding between Intreo and the Education and Training Boards (ETB) and in many areas this works well. However organisations, such as the Irish Organisation for the Unemployed (INOUE) report that the experience is not consistent in all locations.

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27. <http://www.oecd.org/education/innovation-education/19975192.pdf>

# The future of career guidance

Ireland needs a new world-class model of career guidance which embraces lifelong learning and life-wide career guidance. Such a model would provide a coherent, structured system to support the individual career management, building on the existing structures and providing supplemental supports to enhance the effectiveness of existing services. This model would enable individuals at any point in their lives to identify their interests, skills, competences and experience, manage transitions and make the appropriate education, training and occupational decisions that meet their needs at that time. This structure would benefit the individual, the education system, employers and society.

Supported by the development of a national strategy for lifelong career guidance, the principles of the long-term vision for career guidance would be:

- A client-centred approach;
- Accessibility through multiple channels to allow flexible ease of access at a time and place that suits the user e.g. face-to-face; telephone; email; web-chat; social media alongside supporting online resources;
- Appropriate information for all stakeholders i.e. students, parents, employers, educators, career guidance professionals;
- Trained and continuously upskilling professionals providing the service in various capacities;
- Relevance and accessibility to all users with particular consideration for students of different ages; individuals at different life stages; people with disabilities; lone parents; non-Irish nationals; career returners; adult learners; career changers; and jobseekers;
- A partnership approach with all stakeholders, whereby guidance provided by professionals in various institutions will be complementary and connected to ensure the delivery of an effective service.

The full realisation of this model will require significant investment and re-structuring over a prolonged period of time. This will be achieved by putting appropriate structures in place such as the single portal of information for all users and stakeholders which would also manage employer engagement in a co-ordinated and efficient manner. In addition, a strategic focus that brings a coherency to the overall career guidance and education approach in Ireland will provide a framework to start putting the necessary structures in place. However, in the shorter term there is an urgent need to provide

**Figure 1. The Future of Career Guidance**



supplementary support to the second level school system through a specialist careers advisory service funded by the National Training Fund.

To achieve this model of career guidance would require a focus on seven key areas:

- 1) **National Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance**
- 2) **Specialist school careers advisory service delivered through regional centres**
- 3) **Careers education within schools**
- 4) **Professional development**
- 5) **Technology and innovation**
- 6) **Labour market intelligence**
- 7) **Employer engagement**

## 1) National Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance

### Recommendation 1:

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and stakeholders from education and enterprise should develop a structured National Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance to ensure coherent career guidance provision is developed for all individuals, at all life stages across Ireland. This strategy should be delivered through a national Careers Guidance Steering Committee.

A structured national strategy is required to provide a framework for the various elements of the system to connect and signpost the options and available assistance to users and other stakeholders. It should provide goals and objectives for what career guidance hopes to achieve and to prepare individuals for the future of work and to contribute to society.

The objective of career guidance should be to develop individuals who are effective career decision-makers and can manage their choices and progress through education, training and employment over the course of their lifetimes, making effective transitions as necessary. A coherent strategy would offer a plan for how equality of opportunity and consistent, impartial, professional advice and information is made available to all. It would provide a framework where the right advice is available in the right place at the right time and would be supported by experienced educators and employers. Such a strategy could map what expectation there is at every stage of the education lifecycle for career guidance and what actors are available to provide the career guidance “family of activities” as described by the OECD. It would offer a picture of career guidance and education in Ireland now, as well as a vision of the model of career guidance and education to which we aspire.

To support the strategy and the development of a career guidance service that is world-class, a national Careers Guidance Steering Committee should be created. The Committee should include representatives from business, education and other stakeholders.

The Committee’s role would be to ensure the careers guidance service is delivering on its commitment to individual provision across a wide spectrum of users and meeting

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28. See page 9

the objectives of the National Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance. It would facilitate engagement between government departments and agencies; and between the careers guidance service, employers and other key stakeholders, such as parents and students, to ensure supports at an appropriate level.

## 2) Specialist school careers advisory service delivered through regional centres

### Recommendation 2:

Department of Education and Skills should collaborate with enterprise to develop a specialist careers advisory service to supplement current school guidance provision. This service could be supported by the National Training Fund.

The Department of Education and Skills should work with enterprise to develop a specialist careers advisory service to supplement current school guidance provision. This would involve the development of a sophisticated multi-system model whereby an overarching specialist careers advisory service would be available, initially as a specialist support to post-primary students and eventually to assist individuals at any point during their lives to make educational, training and employment choices. This service could also be a support to other career guidance professionals and stakeholders.

The service could be based in existing regional education centres and available throughout the year to ensure its viability. A critical element of the specialist careers advisory service would be collaboration between its staff and school careers guidance counsellors. The career advisors' focus would be on the delivery of regular career information and advice, supported by appropriate psychometric tests and annual individual meetings with the students. Co-ordination of such sessions could be done through the school or directly with the guidance service. This process would be data driven, recorded and strongly connected to the school.

In time, this approach could be expanded into an integrated specialist careers advisory service to assist individuals of all ages and experiences in considering their interests, abilities and ambitions while informing them about the labour market and education system opportunities. Career advisors could support those at all levels of education, those about to enter the labour market, those temporarily excluded from the labour market, those returning to and those in employment. This would enable them to develop the skills to plan their careers while managing intentional and unplanned career changes as they arise. Advisors would be able to accept referrals from Intreo as required. They would also be skilled to recognise when an individual should be referred for specialist assistance such as psychological counselling or other health services.

The success of the careers advisory service will depend on a systematic approach, supported by a robust data system. To support this, there should be clear performance measures to demonstrate the impact of career guidance on education, training and employment outcomes, both in the short and longer term. Administrative data sources should be used to develop longitudinal outcomes. The recent CSO and Higher Education Authority report on graduate outcomes<sup>29</sup> provides a good example in this regard.

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29. <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2018/highereducationoutcomes-graduatesof2010-2014/>

Ibec believe this specialist careers advisory service to support current school guidance provision should be supported by the National Training Fund (NTF) and would offer a valuable investment in the future of Ireland's young people. The National Training Fund (NTF) was established by the National Training Fund Act 2000 to raise the skills of those in employment, to give jobseekers relevant skills and to facilitate lifelong learning. Therefore, the proposed specialist school careers advisory service supports the NTF's objectives in helping to ensure young peoples' readiness to engage in learning and development for the labour market.

### 3) Careers education within schools

#### Recommendation 3:

The careers guidance strategy should define distinct roles and responsibilities for guidance counsellors and careers advisors to instil the complementarity of the roles and signpost where individuals can go for different types of supports.

Careers guidance counsellors, who are qualified teachers with a professional qualification in guidance and counselling, will continue to provide careers education and pastoral care within the school system. Careers education could be included as a taught timetabled provision within schools, allowing meaningful opportunities for personal career planning, a focus on the development of employability skills, investigating what to expect from the world of work and the opportunity for work experience at appropriate stages within the post-primary system.

This role will include trying to spark the capacity and appetite for lifelong learning in students to motivate them to pursue continuous development which will support them in "future proofing" their skills, discovering their aptitudes and interests, and directing their future. It will involve raising career aspirations and forging connections between education and learning and the world of work. The development of career self-management skills at this stage is vital to equip students to navigate their future. The Whole School Guidance Framework<sup>30</sup> provides a good model but is not systematically implemented across the school system.

Guidance counsellors will work with students to develop their ability to keep records of their career related learning and employability skills to ensure they are preparing themselves for a successful future career in whatever area they pursue. An e-portfolio structure, as has been considered for junior and senior cycle learning and assessment, could support this ambition, but would require suitable technological requirements to be available in all locations. A portfolio approach allows students to manage their own learning and see its association to career plans. Supports would need to be provided to guidance counsellors to ensure consistency of provision across schools and to ensure students are given adequate time for reflection.

Guidance counsellors would draw on the specialist careers advisory service for the provision of other elements of guidance such as career information and individual career counselling, freeing them up to embed the foundations of career management and support the wellbeing of students.

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30. <https://www.ncge.ie/school-guidance-handbook/ncge-whole-school-guidance-framework>

## 4) Professional Development

Both guidance counsellors within the education system and careers advisors within the advisory service should engage in prescribed hours of continuous professional development (CPD) annually to ensure their knowledge and skills remain up-to-date. This CPD should include labour market knowledge provided by employers and other key stakeholders. This would support them in understanding the changing labour market and making use of labour market information. It should also include insights into unconscious bias and gender stereotyping to understand the issues that can influence career decisions by boys and girls. This could be a significant initial step in broadening labour market opportunities and addressing occupational segregation later in life. Professional development should also address social inclusion and the structural (e.g. financial constraints, social networks) and attitudinal barriers (e.g. low expectations, intergenerational disadvantage) facing various cohorts of clients to ensure they can meet the needs of a diverse population.

Careers advisors will engage in work placements each year with different industries and employers to ensure their labour market knowledge is grounded in practical knowledge. A pilot project took place in 2017 for trainee teachers to undertake a paid internship in the high technology sector through the summer holidays, with Accenture and Intel providing opportunities. The initiative is being expanded this year. A model of this format could be developed for careers advisors nationwide particularly in growth sectors.

## 5) Technology and innovation

### Recommendation 4:

The Careers Guidance Steering Committee should develop multi-channel, innovative and technological solutions including a single web portal, to ensure the guidance service provides advice and support appropriate to all users at a suitable time and place.

The career guidance and advisory system should use technology and innovation to deliver an effective service in the most cost effective, timely and accessible manner to benefit the range of users it will support.

For a robust careers advisory service, it would be essential to have a single portal that brings together a central source of career information, including labour market information, education and training, upskilling and reskilling, course, occupation and job information and career management tools to help individuals make informed decisions. The portal could be divided into distinct areas to enable ease of navigation and also to allow individuals to peruse their options prior to discussing them further with an advisor. This would enable individuals to retain control of their career decisions, while extending their knowledge of labour market developments and how to engage with them. This facility would support the careers advisory system in offering a multi-channel approach to the guidance service, whereby users could access information and psychometric tests online at a time and location that best suited their needs, prior to attending a local service for more focused and directed guidance.

There are a wide variety of sources of web-based information and support available particularly to post-primary students. They include *Qualifax* which details courses offered in Ireland from PLC to post-graduate level, the CAO website which outlines higher education courses, admission tests like the HPAT and supports like the *Higher Education Access Route* and *Disability Access Route to Education* schemes, *UCAS* which details undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the UK and Northern Ireland, while *Eunicas* outlines the programmes taught through the English language across Europe. *Coursehub* reviews colleges and courses by existing and past students while the *Careers Portal* provides an overview of the labour market and the jobs that relate to particular skills and interests. It complements the course information on *Qualifax* and also gives students access to interest and personality profile tests to help students inform their choices.

However, a single portal should address the diverse needs of students at all levels. It should also have elements tailored to recently unemployed jobseekers, those who wish to change career, long-term unemployed, returners and those interested in self-employment. While this would require significant structuring to ensure accessibility and user friendliness, it would offer a one-stop-shop location for life-long learning and career management. Career advice delivery methods such as webinars, online web chat or telephone sessions with advisors and the use of online booking systems could support the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. This may also support individuals with particular needs (e.g. childcare, in work, disability) who have difficulty in attending face-to-face advisory sessions.

The portal should have a section dedicated to parents to help them support their children through post-primary subject and career choices. Research suggests that parents are the main source of support for career planning. However, this advice and support can vary by social background, experience and within socio-economic groups<sup>31</sup>. The advice may be coloured by parents' own experiences with education and the labour market, rather than being based on objective and up-to-date information. Therefore, a well-designed portal could provide parents with up-to-date trends, careers information and options, and help them feel more comfortable in supporting their children.

The portal should also feature a work experience page which shows post-primary, third level and FET students how to research, secure and organise placements in the areas that interest them. Finally, it could host a section for careers guidance counsellors and careers advisors with webinars and resources to allow the sharing of best practices<sup>32</sup> and deliver professional development in a convenient manner.

To support the multi-channel approach, social media is also growing as a tool for career guidance and information. For example, the Ministry of Children and Education in Denmark uses Facebook, in addition to more mainstream approaches, to share student and graduate reflections on courses, subjects and career choices and experiences. Such an approach would offer an up to date content-driven appropriate service to meet the diverse needs of individuals entering, within or transitioning through the changing labour market.

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31. <https://www.esri.ie/pubs/BKMNEXT195.pdf>

32. This has been used successfully by early years educators using the <http://aistearsiolta.ie/en/> portal.

## 6) Labour Market Intelligence

### Recommendation 5:

The responsible groups and agencies (including the Regional Skills Fora, Solas Skills and Labour Market Research Unit, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the Intreo service) should provide up to date labour market intelligence in a user-friendly, accessible format to inform guidance counsellors, careers advisors, students, parents and jobseekers.

High quality labour market information should be provided to all stakeholders including careers guidance counsellors, careers advisors, students and parents. This includes analysis of trends, predictions of future labour market needs, identification of the range of skills required and the potential subjects or courses associated with these skills. This is critical given the speed at which the labour market is changing.

There is a wealth of labour market intelligence being collected through several sources including the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, the Strategic Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS and the Regional Skills Fora. These sources, as well as local employers more generally, can provide valuable information on future employment opportunities.

However, this information should be produced in an easily assimilated format that quickly updates all stakeholders on the most recent trends. Given the volume and range of information available and the rapid changes in the marketplace, it can be difficult for individuals or career practitioners to always remain up-to-date. The Skills Barometer<sup>33</sup> which is produced annually in Northern Ireland in infographic and report format provides a good model. It is accessible and gives a concise overview of the macro-economic forecast, the supply-demand balance, careers advice and policy developments. It engages a range of stakeholders from schools to business groups and enables practitioners to stay on top of the changing needs of the labour market. The information is aimed at ensuring careers decisions are informed about the trends in employment, the opportunities in specific occupational areas and the skills and competences valued by employers. This information could be augmented by annual regional or national labour market conferences for careers guidance counsellors and careers advisors, with inputs from a broad range of enterprise stakeholders.

## 7) Employer engagement

### Recommendation 6:

The Careers Guidance Steering Committee should oversee the development of a more coherent and professional structure through which employers can engage with schools, higher and further education, to provide support in career planning skills, careers information, role models, careers talks and fairs, and work placements.

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31. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/NI-Skills-Barometer-2017-Summary-Report.pdf>

Employers have a role to play as key stakeholders in ensuring that Ireland is ready for the future of work. However, employer engagement with different levels of the education system can be quite disjointed, ad hoc and reliant on local relationships (e.g. individual relationships through family connections and the student; alumni connections with the school or college and faculty connections with particular employers).

While employers may want to engage, they find it a very fragmented structure to work with, with multiple points of entry. SMEs, in particular, struggle with understanding who or how to engage with an institution, as many schools and colleges lack an employer liaison person leading to multiple or no queries for support. This lack of cohesion can disadvantage different individuals, institutions or locations and impact their ability to access work placements, careers talks etc. Therefore, each institution, whether school or college, should have a designated person to take responsibility for this role.

The national careers strategy should provide for a coherent role for employers to engage and support the development of life-long learners at critical junctures. This could be co-ordinated through the proposed portal, using a model such as *Marketplace*<sup>34</sup> which is used by Skills Development Scotland. This could facilitate a range of connections from careers skills to work placements between business and education including:

- **Dissemination of career skills**

Employers have distinct expertise in this field and should encourage graduate preparedness by offering interview skills, coaching and CV preparation skills as part of careers clinics. This will help individuals to emphasise the distinct qualities they bring to organisations and identify skills gaps. This can also help emphasise the employability skills that employers expect from graduates, and how students might focus on developing and articulating those skills. In addition, it helps understanding of the diversity of roles within business organisations and the importance of targeting these within CVs and applications.

- **Careers information**

In addition, employers could develop factsheets, with case studies, relevant skills and entry requirements, sector training programmes and job trend information, to complement existing careers resources. These could be used both by careers guidance teachers and careers advisors in supporting individuals and parents.

- **Role modelling**

Talks from alumni, recent graduates and particularly from individuals who challenge stereotypes offer opportunities for students to identify themselves as future graduates and in careers that they may not have considered. This is particularly important around gender stereotypes to prevent a narrowing of career options.

- **Careers talks and careers fairs**

There is ad hoc access and provision of careers talks and careers fairs at all levels of the system from post-primary to job seekers. Various stakeholders would benefit from local, regional and national events for students, teachers, careers guidance counsellors and careers advisors, parents and jobseekers.

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34. <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/supporting-scotlands-employers/marketplace/>

- **Work placements**

Work placements are a highly effective method of introducing young people to the world of work, raise awareness of different opportunities, develop employability skills and allow a taster of what a particular career or role might entail. Currently the quality of work experience opportunities tends to be very uneven. Durations of placements vary from institution to institution and often multiple requests come to employers at the same time. Similarly, depending on location and relationships, different opportunities are available to different schools and students, and there is no consistency or equality of access. Work placements are important at post-primary level, third level and in FET. The *National Skills Strategy: Ireland's Future*<sup>35</sup> sets ambitious targets to raise the number of placements offered by employers and the appointment of employer liaison staff in schools and colleges would help to deliver these targets.

A structured work experience format template should be developed in collaboration with employers. For post-primary school students, while there is no expectation of a long workplace experience, it is important that students experience at least two types of workplace during their Transition Year (TY). One option could be to have TY students attend classes for four days per week and spend the fifth day in a workplace. This would give employers the opportunity to build a suitable programme for students and give students the opportunity to job shadow, learn valuable skills about work, work behaviours and possible careers. At a minimum, this could include an agreed set of objectives, key tasks and behaviours agreed between the student, school and employer. At third level and FET, work placements give students the opportunity to apply what they have learned in theory, learn more practical skills and develop knowledge about expectations in the workplace. Through the REAP<sup>36</sup> (Roadmap for Employment Academic Partnership) project, an excellent outline placement pack was developed to support employer, student and institution in getting the most from the placement.

A central system for the management of work experience opportunities particularly for post-primary and FET should also be considered. This could improve the administrative process for schools, colleges and employers and broaden the participation to include greater numbers of SMEs. This has worked well in Northern Ireland through their *Connect to Success*<sup>37</sup> online portal whereby employers across the country post their opportunities and students apply directly. This reduces the administrative burden for both parties, improves social equity and allows quality to be monitored.

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35. [https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub\\_national\\_skills\\_strategy\\_2025.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/pub_national_skills_strategy_2025.pdf)

36. <https://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=reaprepo>

37. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/contacts-az/connect-success-ni>

# Conclusion

Ireland has a wealth of opportunities for individuals to access careers information on learning, development, upskilling and reskilling but these opportunities should be developed on a more coherent and systematic basis. Without the skills of career management, the current and future world of work can seem quite daunting as technology, demographics and globalisation drive rapid change. The development of a more coherent provision of career guidance from “cradle to grave” across the lifecycle would provide benefits to individuals and the economy and offset the investment required to establish such a service. Individuals who are in suitable and fulfilling employment are likely to be more motivated, engaged and economically productive.

Priority must be given to the post-primary system and the establishment of a specialist careers advisory service to support and supplement the current provision. Failure to address this situation in a timely fashion may leave a legacy of individuals unable to meet the challenges of the future workplace and unprepared for the inevitable transitions.

Building a foundation of skills in career development and management which is underpinned by a appetite for lifelong learning will help individuals at all levels and experiences to achieve their potential in the education system and labour market. However, this vision of a national lifelong career guidance service requires radical overhauling of existing structures, the provision of supports and development to those on the front line of career guidance and the engagement of enterprise, education and training. Failure to address this will lead to individual, labour market and competitiveness challenges as we react to, rather than plan for future change. The economic gains far outweigh the costs associated with adjusting the existing fragmented approach to career guidance in Ireland.

# Acknowledgements

This policy document is the result of consultation with careers guidance professionals, educators and employers across different industry sectors, disciplines and roles to ascertain what elements of the career guidance system work well; where problems exist within the system and how it could be enhanced for the benefit of individuals, career guidance professionals, educators, employers and society.

We are extremely grateful to those who shared their insights and experiences on how together enterprise, education and training, with the right structures, strategy and supports can ensure Ireland's people are fulfilling their potential and engaging their talents in an unpredictable world.

For further information contact:

Kara McGann  
Senior Labour Market Policy Executive  
Tel: 01 6051636

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