

# Navigating a Changing World: Ireland's Vision for Lifelong Guidance 2030

## Lifelong Guidance: Policy and Practice

### Introduction

Guidance services in Ireland are inherently holistic and encompass developing three distinct yet interconnected aspects of one's life: personal and social, educational, and career. It has long been understood that to reach these aims, guidance services should empower individuals to make decisions informed by an understanding of themselves, the options available to them, and what the future might hold.

In today's increasingly globalised and digitalised world, evolving work patterns in a growing number of careers and jobs require people to continually upskill, retrain, and engage in lifelong learning. The concept of a 'job for life' is increasingly obsolete, with people needing to anticipate transitions between multiple roles throughout their career. Guidance services must therefore be proactively accessible and available throughout one's life, not just at the common pressure points where their importance becomes most visible.

Five years ago, the Indecon review (2019) found that while Ireland had some quality guidance services, there was a less-than-coherent multiplicity of policies, representative bodies, and delivery methods. Indecon considered this a barrier to effective lifelong guidance, leading to people receiving uncoordinated and ad hoc guidance throughout their life, and made recommendations to address it. Since then, much progress has been made, and this article chronicles that progress.

### National Policy Group for Lifelong Guidance

Over the past decades, Ireland has developed a guidance support system across post-primary education, further



**Dr Carol Guildea**

Guidance Unit, Department of Education



**Manus De Paor**

Guidance Unit, Department of Education

---

**This article tells the story of lifelong guidance in Ireland and how it is evolving through implementation of a cross-governmental policy, subsequent to the Indecon review of career guidance in 2019.**

---

education and training, and higher education. But the range of state involvement in career guidance extends far beyond that, and this breadth of policy was identified by Indecon (2019) as a challenge to forming a coherent national long-term policy.

Additionally, in late 2020, the Department of Education and Skills evolved into two Departments: the Department of Education (DE) and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). This presented further challenges to ensuring that guidance services were complementary rather than overlapping.

Cognisant of the Indecon recommendations and the need to homogenise the planning of guidance services, while ensuring they are truly lifelong, government departments and other organisations, such as Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), restructured many guidance-related responsibilities. This included new supports for the development of guidance counsellors and whole-school-guidance teams in post-primary schools through Oide, the formation of the new centralised policy- and decision-making Guidance Unit in DE, and the establishment of the new National Policy Group for Lifelong Guidance, all in 2022.

This National Policy Group was established to steer the development of a coherent long-term strategic framework for lifelong guidance, and to ensure that the response to Indecon's recommendations was consistent with national and international approaches. It comprised senior officials from five government departments: DE, DFHERIS, Department of Social Protection (DSP), Department of Children, Equality, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), and Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE).

It was with great dedication that we in the Guidance Unit led the work of this group, which proved a very successful and productive collaboration, beginning with the public consultation on lifelong guidance in early 2023.

## National Framework for Guidance – public consultation

With any major reform in policy or governance, it is vital to listen to *all* voices most affected. For this reason, our work began with a broad public consultation that prioritised flexibility and equity of access.

A wide range of stakeholders were invited first to read a consultation paper (DE, 2023b), which outlined the background of guidance in Ireland, provided a rationale for developing lifelong guidance, presented international perspectives on guidance policy, and outlined the vision for lifelong guidance in Ireland. They were then invited to discuss these and could contribute their views in various

---

*The National Policy Group was established to steer the development of a coherent long-term strategic framework for lifelong guidance.*

---

ways. In total, DE held 11 focus groups and received 61 written submissions and 611 online survey engagements.

The feedback was a comprehensive, conclusive, and invaluable resource with which we could build the foundations of our National Strategic Framework (DE, 2023c). It showed clear support for the draft vision for lifelong guidance and highlighted many areas of concern. These included the need to clearly define the role of guidance counsellors across different sectors, raise awareness of guidance services available beyond educational settings, create stronger links between employers and guidance services, and improve many other important aspects.

---

*The framework looks to establish clear standards and to ensure consistency across providers by defining what constitutes high-quality guidance.*

---

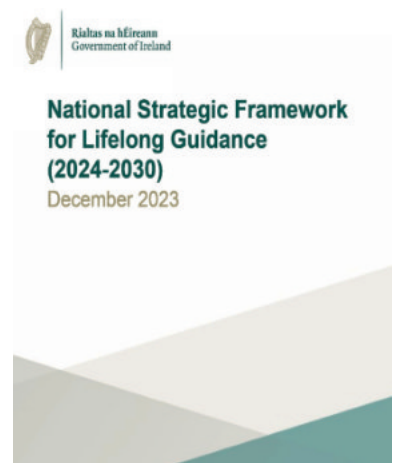
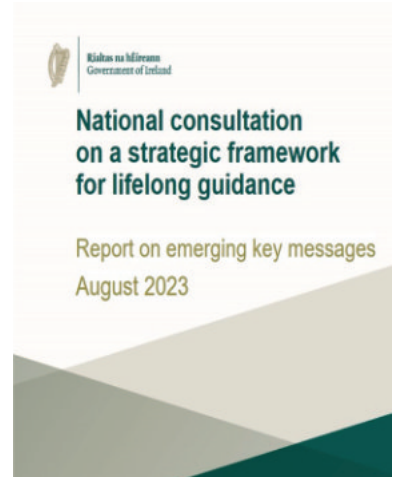
### **National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2024–2030)**

Drawing on insights from the public consultation, the National Policy Group members, and an advisory group of representatives from 12 stakeholder groups, the ambitious ‘Vision for Lifelong Guidance’ was developed to its full potential into the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (DE, 2023c) and its accompanying Strategic Action Plan for Lifelong Guidance (DE, 2023d).

The framework envisions deliberate and systematic coordination of guidance services across all sectors, while

acknowledging the need for varied support at the many stages in all education and career pathways. It understands that people may require different forms of guidance to address their unique needs throughout their lives, regardless of their circumstances, previous experiences, educational level, or other factors.

The framework looks to establish clear standards and to ensure consistency across providers by defining what constitutes high-quality guidance, while improving, encouraging, and facilitating the continuing professional



development (CPD) of guidance practitioners. It emphasises the implementation of person-centred, universal-design principles and inclusivity policies across the guidance space.

Further to its holistic aims, the framework engages with the workforce-development agenda by strengthening links between industry, educational institutions, and guidance services, and improving the navigability of learning and development opportunities for those entering, already in, and transitioning between careers and employment.

Ultimately, it outlines the vision, pillars, objectives, and outcomes of lifelong guidance in Ireland. Four pillars support the framework:

1. Visibility and awareness of lifelong-guidance services and information provision
2. Standards and quality throughout the lifelong-guidance system
3. Access, inclusion, and universal design
4. Career-management skills and lifelong career mobility.

Under these pillars are eight objectives:

1. Enhance cooperation and coordination between those responsible for lifelong guidance with clear division of responsibilities and strong coordination.
2. Ensure greater awareness and access to lifelong guidance to make meaningful, well-informed, and conscious decisions about education and careers in an ever-changing world.
3. Embed lifelong guidance within the world of work.
4. Improve clarity around standards and quality in lifelong guidance.
5. Further develop evidence-based policies that will improve the quality and impact of lifelong guidance.
6. Promote inclusion and equity of access through the provision of lifelong guidance, underpinned by a universal-design approach.
7. Strive to ensure that career planning and management skills will be a consistent focus of guidance provision.
8. Support career mobility for individuals through guidance provision throughout the lifespan. Target dates are allocated to each action.

With these pillars and objectives, the framework strives for more visible, accessible, streamlined, and complementary provision of guidance throughout Ireland. They provide a critical building block towards further developing and enhancing guidance services across the country. This is substantiating itself, even at this early stage, through the ongoing implementation of the framework's accompanying strategic action plan.

---

*Ultimately, the framework outlines the vision, pillars, objectives, and outcomes of lifelong guidance in Ireland.*

---

## National Strategic Action Plan for Lifelong Guidance (2024–2030) and policy implementation

The National Strategic Action Plan for Lifelong Guidance (2024–2030) outlines the strategic actions being undertaken at national level to achieve the identified outcomes in the strategic framework. It provides a roadmap for lifelong guidance and draws on the approach of the National Policy Group by assigning government departments to lead collaborative approaches on actions outlined in the plan.

Under the four strategic pillars, 35 actions are outlined and are being delivered by the National Policy Group and stakeholders such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Oide, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), and ETBI. The advisory group supports this work at important moments. Implementation of the strategic action plan began immediately, and a strong and meaningful start has been made.

The culmination of this work was presented at a national forum in Dublin Castle in summer 2024. A total of 140 stakeholders representing 60 organisations came together to reflect on, develop, promote, and disseminate new knowledge and learning throughout all aspects of lifelong guidance, in accordance with action 5.2.

### *Department of Education*

The DE Guidance Unit is actively engaging to progress actions in different areas of post-primary guidance. For instance, the DE has committed to increasing the supply of guidance counsellors by funding a new training programme at Maynooth University, starting in January 2025 (action 4.3). Those already qualified and employed in recognised post-primary schools are continuing to receive CPD aligned with their training needs in all aspects of guidance (action 4.1). Efforts are under way to ensure that guidance support for students in special schools is provided by appropriately trained professionals (action 2.6).

The DE is exploring ways to ensure high-quality standards and consistency in guidance provision for post-primary schools (action 4.4), while we continue to develop and share new resources to enhance guidance practices in these schools (action 4.6). We are committed to developing new supporting materials that incorporate learnings from existing programmes in special and post-primary schools. These materials aim to facilitate clear planning and positive transitions to further education, employment, or disability day services as appropriate (action 2.9). Transition Year micro-modules that support teaching and learning in areas such as career exploration and work experience are under development (action 2.8).

---

*The Department of Education has committed to increasing the supply of guidance counsellors by funding a new training programme at Maynooth University, starting in January 2025.*

---

*Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science*

DFHERIS has outlined the steps it is taking to implement the recommendations of the *OECD Skills Strategy Ireland* report, including those on guidance. These steps include a clear focus on career information and the navigability of information available on career options and the choices offered by the skills ecosystem (action 1.2). Along the same lines, DFHERIS is working to further develop the careers information portal (action 2.2). The ambition is to engage with users in an accessible format and provide up-to-date information on careers and training opportunities at all career stages.

To progress all other actions in the action plan, DFHERIS collaborates with DE and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), which is supported by DETE and includes industry representatives (action 3.2). Over the years, the EGFSN has made recommendations on the need for better career guidance and the benefits of having industry participate in conversations with students about careers.

*Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment*

The DETE highlights the importance of guidance provision through the work and reports of the EGFSN, which frequently recommend the promotion of career opportunities and pathways. Industry stakeholders often say they see great value in connecting with schools to explain career opportunities to students and observe that a coherent approach to lifelong guidance is consistent with the EGFSN's goals to minimise future skills gaps. DETE officials collaborate with DFHERIS and DE on all actions relating to lifelong guidance in the action plan.

*Department of Social Protection*

DSP has provided an overview of the Public Employment Service, provided by Intreo and Intreo Partners, in the context of the Pathways to Work Strategy 2021–2025. The aim of this service is to support jobseekers to obtain sustainable employment, with an emphasis on providing individualised employment supports. DSP's work here is pivotal to progressing action 8.1, 'to enhance the provision of access to guidance at key stages so that an individual may upskill and retrain, thereby enabling career mobility of the workforce'. For example, when a jobseeker is preparing to become 'job ready', their employment personal adviser or job coach will help them develop a personal progression plan that will identify if they require further training or education first.

*Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth*

Across DCEDIY, work is ongoing to ensure better access to information and supports, particularly for young people embarking on their careers. Under the

---

*DFHERIS is working to further develop the careers information portal with the aim of engaging with users in an accessible format and providing up-to-date information on careers and training opportunities at all career stages.*

---

Guidance Framework (action 2.9), DCEDIY supports DE in developing materials to help transitions from special and post-primary schools to further education, employment, or disability services. In keeping with action 3.4, DCEDIY is leading discussions across government for developing Ireland's next National Disability Strategy and recently published the new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024–2028.

The disability strategy will operate as a plan for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a framework for coordinating disability policy across government. The Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy outlines key government objectives in those communities, such as reducing unemployment, supporting self-employment, addressing labour market barriers, and building inclusive workplace cultures. Further, the new Autism Innovation Strategy (DCEDIY, 2024a) aims to improve mainstream service provision for autistic people, focusing on equal access to public services, education, and employment.

---

*The Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy outlines key government objectives in those communities, such as reducing unemployment, supporting self-employment, addressing labour market barriers, and building inclusive workplace cultures.*

---

## Conclusion

We are pleased with the progress that has been made, and is continuing to be made, by the working group on the National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance and accompanying action plan. We intend for a transformative shift in lifelong guidance policy and therefore in guidance services that can make meaningful improvements in society, the economy, and people's lives.

A strategic emphasis on equity and inclusivity not only looks to guarantee that everyone has access to the resources and supports they need to succeed, but also fosters social cohesion and narrows the often-discriminatory gaps between education and employment opportunities, contributing to a more just and equitable society.

Through collaborative efforts, we look to align skills development with industry needs, reducing skills gaps and enhancing workforce mobility. By encouraging stronger links between education, guidance services, and industry, we can promote a more resilient and adaptable economy, better equipped to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global landscape.

---

## REFERENCES

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (2024a) *Autism Innovation Strategy*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (2024b) *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II 2024–2028*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.



Department of Education (DE) (2023a) *National Consultation on a Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance – Report on Key Messages Emerging August 2023*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Department of Education (DE) (2023b) *National Framework for Lifelong Guidance Consultation Paper*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Department of Education (DE) (2023c) *National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2024–2030)*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Department of Education (DE) (2023d) *National Strategic Action Plan for Lifelong Guidance (2024–2030)*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Department of Social Protection (DSP) (2024) *Pathways to Work 2021–2025 – Updated Strategy Following Mid-Term Review*. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Indecon (2019) *Indecon Review of Career Guidance Final Report*. Dublin: Indecon.



On 20 November 2024, South East Technological University (SETU) hosted the launch of TU RISE (TU Research and Innovation Supporting Enterprise), at its Cork Road Campus.

The event brought together industry leaders, academics, and policymakers to celebrate the transformative impact of TU RISE and its role in driving regional development.

SETU President, Professor Veronica Campbell, said:

"The launch of TU RISE is a defining moment for SETU... As we continue to build and grow this initiative, we must remember that it is only through collaboration, curiosity, and bold thinking that we will achieve the transformative impact we seek."