



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Guidance Counselling Supervision

Professional Support Programme

For Guidance Counsellors in Post Primary School, PLC & CFE settings

Evaluation Report

September 2023 - June 2024

Section 1: Annual Reflection on Guidance Counselling Supervision 2023-24

Section 2: Supervision Session Evaluation 2023-24

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The National Steering Committee, who oversee the supervision programme for guidance counsellors, would like to take this opportunity to thank Guidance Counsellors for taking the time to provide feedback, which provides critical information that informs CPD for Supervisors, securing funding and provides data/evidence to facilitate ongoing development and improvement.

Introduction

Guidance counselling, a specialised support provided in schools and other locations, is described as “person-centred, holistic in nature and incorporates educational, career and personal/social elements” (Government of Ireland 2023, p.11). According to the *National Framework for Lifelong Guidance*, guidance counsellors aim to “empower individuals who are supported to develop a capacity for adaptation, innovation, creativity and self-motivation and to be confident in their ability to meet their potential” (Government of Ireland 2023, p.11).

Guidance counselling is a key part of the whole school guidance (WSG) programme. It may be “offered on an individual or group basis as part of a developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis” (DES Inspectorate 2005, p.4). Guidance counselling aims to empower students to “make decisions, solve problems, address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and resolve difficulties they may be experiencing” (DES Inspectorate 2005, p.4). Within a WSG approach, the role of the guidance counsellor includes supporting the work of the Student Support Team (NEPS 2021) and operating along a continuum of support to address the educational, social, emotional, and behavioural needs of all students (DE 2023; DE 2024). Guidance counsellors may also liaise between students and external counselling agencies or professional services agencies, supporting student clients until such external services become available.

In addition, guidance counsellors play a vital role in implementing the Wellbeing Policy and Practice Framework, working collaboratively within schools to promote student wellbeing (Government of Ireland 2019).

For guidance counsellors to deliver a professional programme, it is recommended they attend professional support (Guidance Counselling Supervision) throughout the academic year (IGC 2012; DE 2023). According to the *IGC Code of Ethics and Practice for Supervisors of Guidance Counsellors*, counselling supervision is defined as:

an effective means of assisting guidance counsellors to maintain and enhance their competence by providing continuing clinical skill development, ongoing consultation regarding legal and ethical issues and a professional support system that can mitigate stress and burnout.

(IGC 2009, p.1)

The Department of Education funds the professional support guidance counselling supervision programme (DE 2023). Participation is open to all appropriately qualified guidance counsellors who are employed in post-primary school and Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) / colleges of further education (CFE) settings (Monaghan Education Centre 2023a).

The programme offers professional support through five two-hour meetings with a qualified supervisor. In the academic year 2023-2024, there were 156 supervision groups meeting across the country on the designated afternoon agreed upon by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors and their branch network.

These sessions are run by qualified counselling supervisors who manage the overall agenda and time, provide feedback, monitor the supervisory relationship, create a safe place, and monitor ethical issues (Monaghan Education Centre 2012).

Group sessions are formally contracted, and at the start, it must be agreed by all members that:

supervision is a forum used by supervisees to reflect on all aspects of their work, where they receive formal and informal feedback on that work and where the welfare of clients and the quality of the service they receive is central

(Monaghan Education Centre 2012)

The purpose of evaluating any project is to facilitate improvement. Feedback is essential to enhance the guidance counselling supervision service provided to practising guidance counsellors in schools and colleges in Ireland. The overall aims of collecting and analysing responses to the evaluation questions posed are to:

- a. Afford supervisees the opportunity to give feedback on their experience
- b. Provide information to the National Steering Committee on the quality of the support being afforded by the programme.
- c. Provide anonymised data for the Department of Education on the programme.

Note: Statistical data from the evaluation will be available on the [Monaghan Education Centre](#) website for the general information of participants.

This report summarises the analysis of the data returned from the *Supervision Session Evaluation* and *Annual Reflection on Guidance Counselling Supervision* forms for the 2023/2024 school year.

Method

Survey instrument

Participants were first asked to provide details on their IGC branch location and supervision group. For confidentiality, this report does not include information on branch location or supervision group. Following this, participants responded to a mix of open- and closed-ended questions about their supervision sessions.

Two separate online evaluation forms for 2023-24 were used:

A) 'Supervision Session Evaluation 2023-24' - completed online at the end of the first four supervision sessions by 1,125 participants.

B) 'Annual Reflection on Guidance Counselling Supervision 2023-24' - completed at the end of the final session for the year by 407 participants.

All data points were included in the analysis.

Limitations of data collection

Mixed methods combine the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Johnson *et al.* 2007). In preparation for the 2021-2022 evaluations, a focus group of supervisors and guidance counsellors was formed to decide on questions for the online evaluation (Monaghan Education Centre 2022). This approach provided a more detailed evaluation of supervision and was previously recommended for its ability to facilitate in-depth research, leading to a more meaningful interpretation of the data (Teddle and Tashakkori 2003). A similar approach was adopted in the *Evaluation Report for 2022-2023* (Monaghan Education Centre 2023b), as well as in the current study. While this method provided valuable insights, certain limitations remain.

The response rate to the 2023-2024 survey was 29% for the Supervision Session Evaluation and 42% for the Annual Reflection on Guidance Counselling Supervision. The National Steering Committee acknowledges that the findings may not represent the opinions and perspectives of Guidance Counsellors who attended supervision but did not complete evaluations. Every effort will be made going forward to optimise feedback from Guidance Counsellors through the evaluation process.

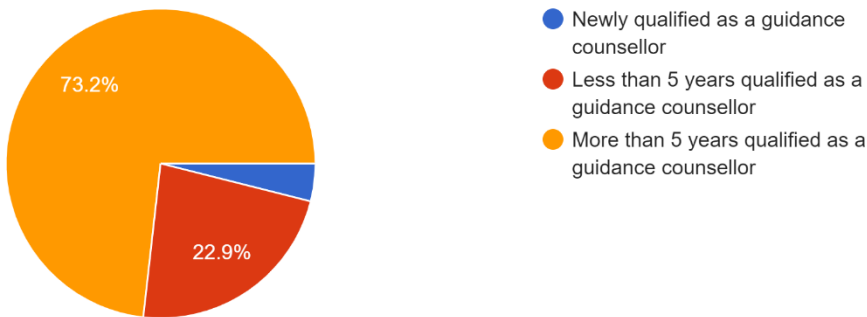
Results

**Section 1: Annual Reflection on Guidance Counselling Supervision
2023-24**

PART A: Experience of guidance counselling supervision

1. Level of experience (n=407)

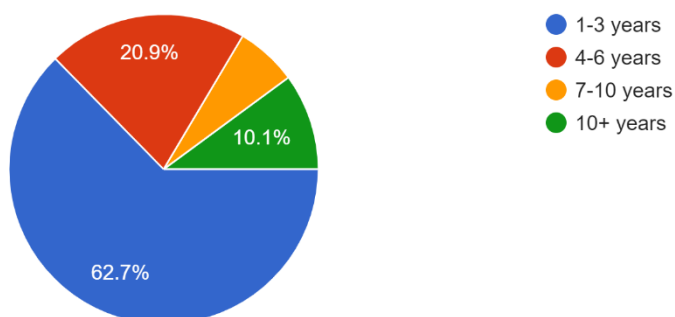
Background data indicated that most guidance counsellors (73.2%) who responded (n=407) to this question have over five years of experience, indicating a largely experienced workforce.



	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Newly qualified as a guidance counsellor	16	3.9%
Less than 5 years qualified as a guidance counsellor	93	22.9%
More than 5 years qualified as a guidance counsellor	298	73.2%

2. Number of years with the same guidance counselling supervisor (n=407)

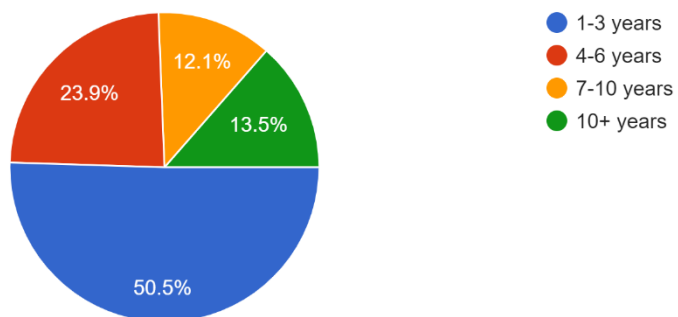
Most participants (62.7%) had the same supervisor for 1-3 years, which suggests that most supervisor relationships are relatively recent.



	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
1-3 years	255	62.7%
4-6 years	85	20.9%
7-10 years	26	6.4%
10+ years	41	10.1%

3. Number of years with the same guidance counselling group (n=406)

Over half of the participants have been with the same guidance counselling group for 1-3 years, with fewer participants in longer-standing groups.

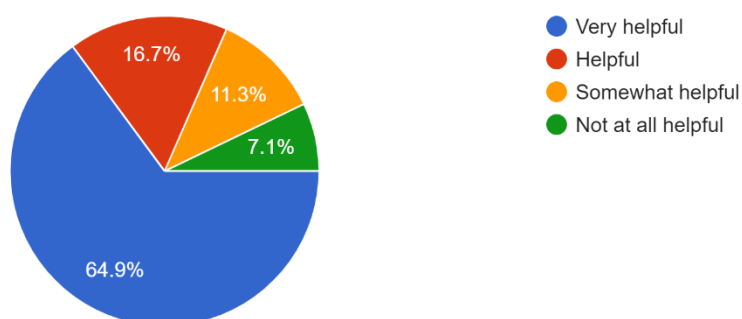


	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
1-3 years	205	50.5%
4-6 years	97	23.9%
7-10 years	49	12.1%
10+ years	55	13.5%

PART B: Annual Reflection on Guidance Counselling Supervision

1. Helpfulness of additional supervision sessions (n=407)

The majority (81.6%) of participants (n=332) ('Very Helpful' and 'Helpful') would find it helpful to have more supervision sessions per year. A smaller portion would find extra sessions only 'somewhat helpful' (11.3%) or 'not at all helpful' (7.1%).



2. Suggestions for improving group (n=407)

The question, "How could the work of the group be improved?" used predetermined responses, revealing that 61.3% of participants felt the group already functioned well and required no changes. Some of the suggested improvements included having 'more sessions' (17.5%), 'face-to-face meetings' (6.1%), and 'submitting a topic before meetings' (4.6%), with smaller percentages for 'better attendance', by being more prepared for supervision', 'by encouraging greater participation', and 'better 'time management'.

	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Group works well as is/no need for change	252	61.3%
More sessions	72	17.5%
Face-to-Face meetings	25	6.1%
Submit a topic before meeting	19	4.6%
Other	14	3.4%
Better attendance	9	2.2%
By my being more prepared for supervision	8	1.9%
By encouraging greater participation	6	1.5%
Better Time Management	2	0.5%

‘Other’ (n=14) suggestions on how the work of the group might be improved are as follows:

Less people in the group /more time /more cases discussed (n=4)

Online /hybrid option (n=3)

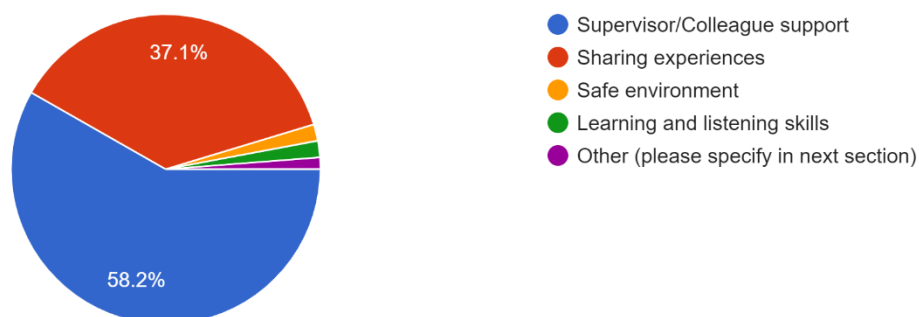
Improved supervision (n=2) (e.g. more familiar with school-based challenges)

Access to group specific experts linked to needs of the group (n=2)

N/A (n=3)

3. The most positive aspect of the supervision experience (n=407)

The most positive aspects of the supervision experience selected from a list of predetermined responses were ‘support from supervisors and colleagues’ (58.7%) and ‘sharing experiences’ (37.1%), with smaller percentages highlighting a ‘safe environment’ (1.7%) and ‘learning and listening skills’ (1.7%).



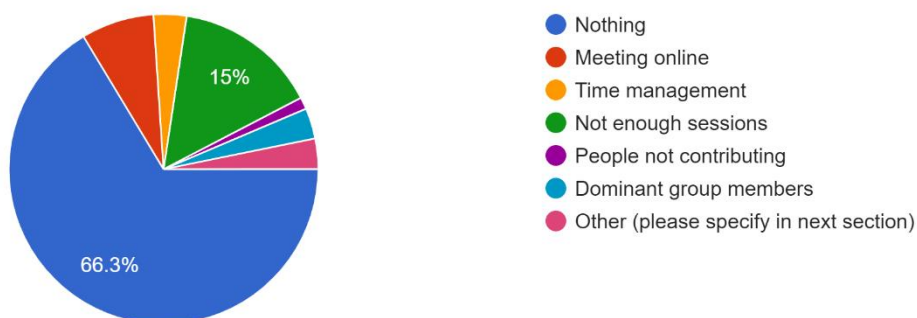
	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Supervisor and colleague support	239	58.7%
Sharing Experiences	151	37.1%
Safe Environment	7	1.7%
Learning and listening skills	7	1.7%
Other	3	0.7%

'Other' (n=3) suggestions on the most positive aspect of the supervision experience are as follows:

- "Any supervision is welcome as it provides a space to discuss very difficult cases that can impact of our mental health as practitioners so helps too with my own wellbeing. Supervision is a special and important part of the practice. It ensures that we as Guidance professional and counsellors are adhering to the highest ethical standards, using up-to-date, evidence-based treatments, getting feedback that encourages my self-awareness and self-reflection"
- "Input from supervisor in counselling techniques"
- "Opportunity to constantly reflect on your professionalism and to improve as a GC"

4. The least positive aspect of the supervision experience (n=407)

Most participants (66.3%) did not identify any 'least positive aspect' of the supervision experience from a list of predetermined responses. Of those who did, the most common issues were 'not enough sessions' (15.0%) and 'meeting online' (7.6%), followed by 'time management' (3.4%), 'dominant group members' (3.2%), and 'people non-contributing' (1.2%).



	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Did not report a 'least positive aspect'	270	66.3%
Not enough sessions	61	15.0%
Meeting Online	31	7.6%
Time management	14	3.4%
Dominant group members	13	3.2%
Other	13	3.2%
People non-contributing	5	1.2%

‘Other’ (n=13) suggestions on the least positive aspect of the supervision experience are as follows:

Issue with supervisor (e.g. out of practice; time wasted on other issues) (n=4)

Poor attendance (i.e. by another member or acknowledging their own) (n=4)

Accessibility (i.e. distance from workplace, no online sessions) (n=2)

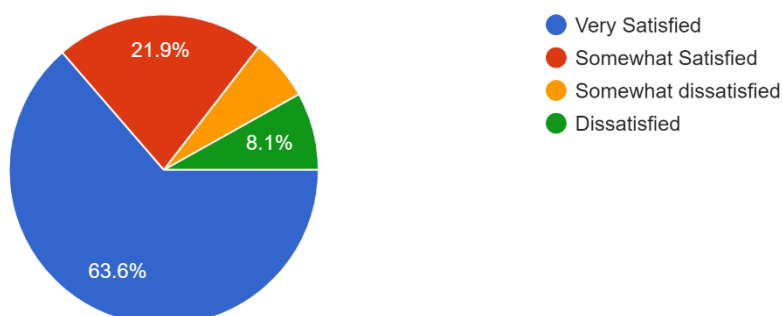
Timing of sessions (n=1)

Poorly maintained venue (n=1)

N/A (n=1)

5. Satisfaction with Online/Remote Supervision Provision this year (n=407)

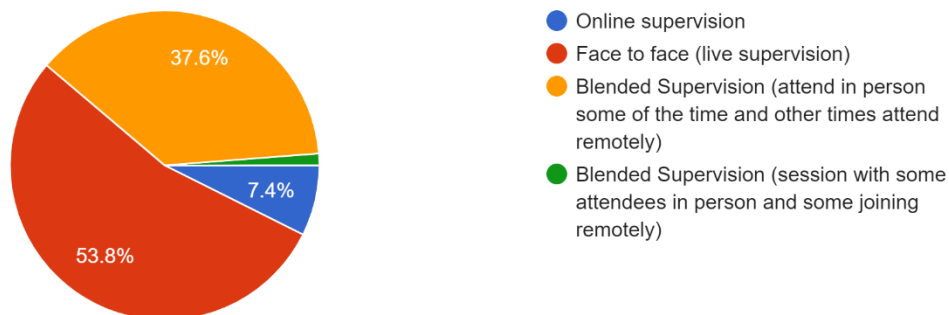
Most participants (85.5%) reported overall satisfaction with online/remote supervision this year, with 63.6% being ‘very satisfied’ and 21.9% ‘somewhat satisfied.’ A smaller group expressed dissatisfaction, with 6.4% ‘somewhat dissatisfied’ and 8.1% ‘dissatisfied.’



	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	259	63.6%
Somewhat Satisfied	89	21.9%
Somewhat dissatisfied	26	6.4%
Dissatisfied	33	8.1%

6. Preference for Supervision Format (n=407)

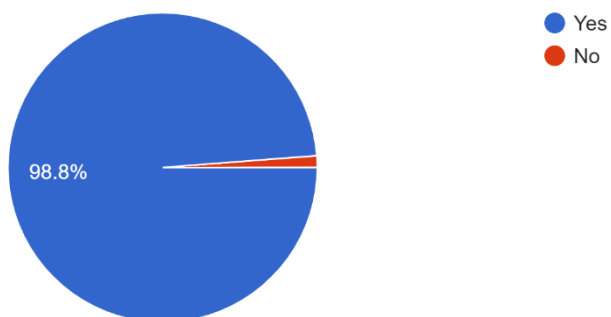
Given the choice, most participants preferred 'face-to-face' or live supervision (53.8%), followed by 'blended supervision', with occasional in-person and remote attendance (37.6%). Fewer opted for 'online' only supervision (7.4%) or 'blended' sessions with mixed remote and in-person attendees (1.2%).



	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Face-to-face	219	53.8%
Blended Supervision (attend in person some of the time and other times attend remotely)	153	37.6%
Online supervision	30	7.4%
Blended Supervision (session with some attendees in person and some joining remotely)	5	1.2%

7. Satisfaction with current supervision group (n=407)

Most participants (98.8%) are happy with their current supervision group, with only a minority (1.2%) expressing dissatisfaction.



	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	402	98.8%
No	5	1.2%

8. Additional feedback and comments (n=169)

In question 8, participants had the opportunity to provide additional feedback and comments on their experience of guidance counselling supervision over 2023-2024. Thematic analysis of feedback and comments (n=145) is shown below, while the remainder (n=24) did not comment or marked 'N/A'.

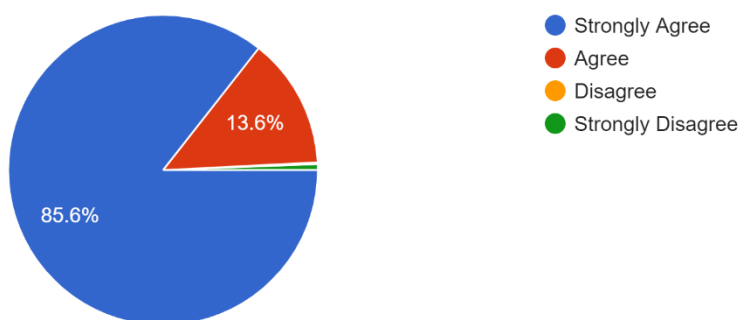
Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 79.6% indicating a favourable experience with guidance counselling supervision. Participants expressed 'appreciation and thanks' (24.9%), 'general positive feedback' (21.7%), 'positive feedback on supervisors' (19.9%) and 'group support' positively (13.1%). 'Suggested improvements' accounted for 6.8%, and some expressed a 'preference for in-person over online supervision' (5.0%), mentioned 'attendance or logistical challenges' (4.5%), or 'requested more sessions' (4.1%).

Sample size = (n)	(n)	(%)	Representative quote
1. Appreciation and thanks	55	24.9%	"An extremely valuable, much needed and appreciated support for guidance counsellors who are facing more challenges, pressures and an ever-increasing workload that ever before. Thank you."
2. General positive feedback	48	21.7%	"Excellent for sharing and learning new techniques for my role as guidance counsellor."
3. Positive feedback on supervisors	44	19.9%	"Our supervisor is a fabulous supervisor. He is so professional, supportive and understanding and we are very lucky indeed."
4 Positive feedback and appreciation of the group	29	13.1%	"Love the group, everyone is so helpful, and we have a wonderful relationship. People are always available on WhatsApp for help and advice also."
5. Miscellaneous feedback and suggested improvements	15	6.8%	"Would love to have a better gender balance in our group it's an all-female group. It would be nice to have a male in the group"
6. Preference for in-person versus online supervision	11	5.0%	"Happy with group however it is difficult to meet in person. The group was set up during Covid and some members need to travel long distances. My preference ideally would be face to face."
7. Attendance and logistical challenges	10	4.5%	"I am happy with my group but geographically it doesn't suit as I have to drive over an hour to get to supervision."
8. Request for more supervision sessions	9	4.1%	"More sessions are needed as the workload for guidance counsellors is immense and we are dealing with a lot of difficult cases so need extra supervision for support."

Section 2: Supervision Session Evaluation 2023-24

1. Session helpfulness and support (n=1,125)

The supervision sessions were overwhelmingly positive, with 99.2% of participants finding them helpful and supportive in their work. Specifically, 85.6% 'strongly agreed', and 13.6% 'agreed'. A small fraction expressed dissatisfaction, with 0.2% disagreeing and 0.6% strongly disagreeing.



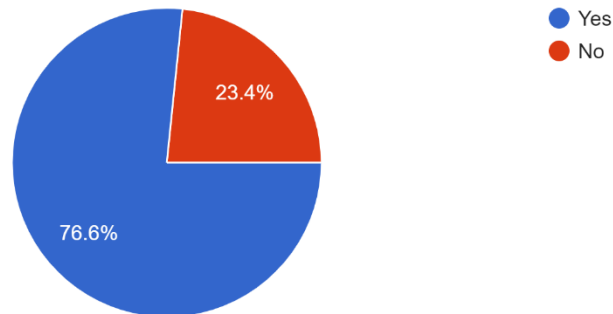
	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	963	85.6%
Agree	153	13.6%
Disagree	2	0.2%
Strongly Disagree	7	0.6%

Participants who either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement: 'this session was helpful and supportive to me in my work' were asked to provide a reason. Of the four responses received from participants who 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed', three were not applicable. The remaining participant provided the following feedback:

- "A lot of GCs coming with a lot of stress. I have my own too, so limited scope for feeling any better/more empowered to deal with it from this session."

2. Preparedness for issue discussion (n=1,125)

Participants were asked whether they had prepared an issue to discuss at this session and 76.8% answered 'Yes', while 23.4% answered 'No'.



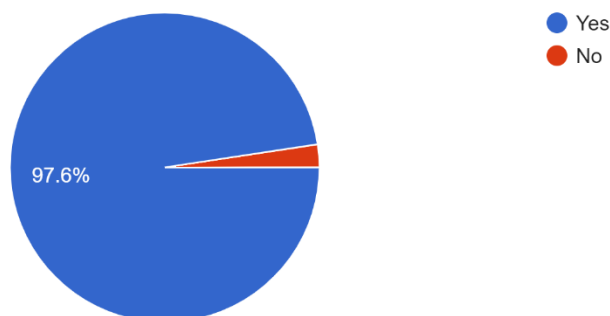
Among those who answered 'Yes' (n=904), who had prepared an issue to discuss at this session, almost all participants (n=903) either 'strongly agreed' (n=759: 84.1%) or 'agreed' (n=144: 15.9%) that it was addressed appropriately.

The remaining participant who either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' cited the following issue:

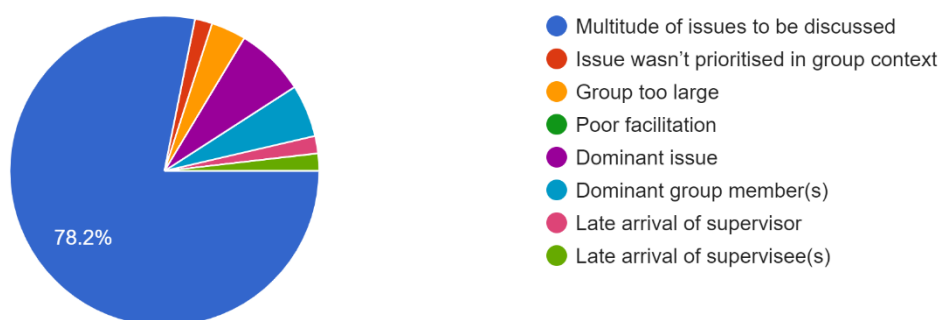
- "Ran out of time".

3. *Sufficient time for all issues (n=1,125)*

Participants were asked whether they had sufficient time to discuss everyone's issues at this session and 97.6% answered 'Yes', while 2.4% answered 'No'.

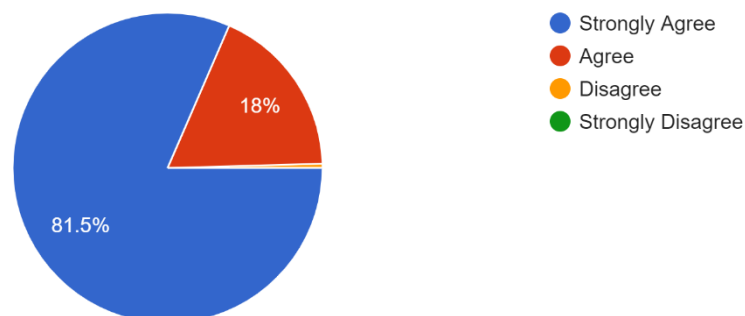


Those who answered 'No' (n=27: 2.4%) were asked to select the 'main reason' from a series of eight predetermined responses. However, more than the original number of participants responded to this question (n=55) since a single-choice checkbox was used. The most selected reason, chosen by 78.2% of participants, was 'multitude of issues to be discussed'.



4. Opportunities for learning maximised (n=1,125)

Participants were asked whether opportunities for learning at this session were maximised, with an overwhelmingly positive response: 99.5% of participants either 'strongly agreed' (81.5%) or 'agreed' (18.0%), while only a minority (0.44%) 'disagreed'.



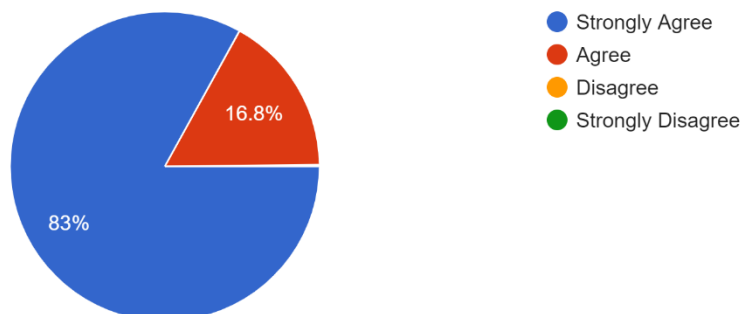
	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	917	81.5%
Agree	203	18.0%
Disagree	5	0.44%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

Participants who either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement: 'opportunities for learning at this session were maximised' were asked to provide a reason. Feedback (n=3) included:

- "It was more like a group discussion, not really advice from Supervisor."
- "Supervisor late arriving."
- "Not fault of facilitator or group, symptom of stress felt by young newly qualified GC's."

5. Mix of challenge and support (n=1,125)

Participants were asked if there is a good mixture of challenge and peer support within the group with an overwhelmingly positive response: 99.8% of participants (n=1,123) either 'strongly agreed' (83.0%) or 'agreed' (16.8%), while only a minority (0.20%) 'disagreed'.



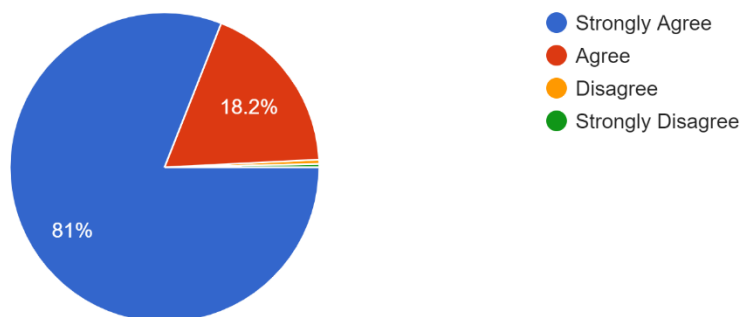
	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	934	83.0%
Agree	189	16.8%
Disagree	2	0.20%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%

Participants who either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement: 'there is a good mixture of challenge and peer support within the group' were asked to provide a reason. The feedback (n=1) noted:

- "Group too small."

6. *Suitability of venue /digital platform for this session (n=1,125)*

An overall majority (n=1,116: 99.2%) of the participants either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the statement 'the venue/digital platform was suitable for this session'.

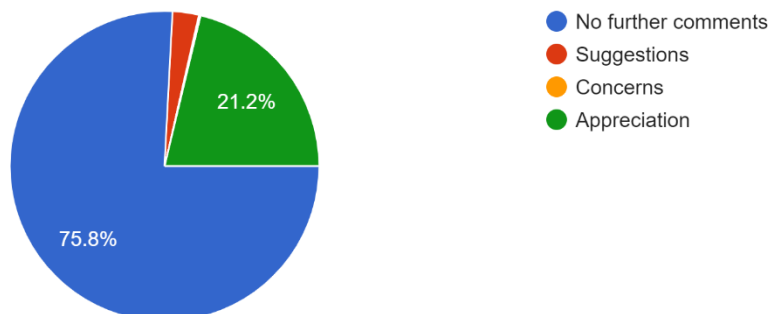


	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	911	81.0%
Agree	205	18.2%
Disagree	5	0.44%
Strongly Disagree	4	0.36%

Participants who either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement: 'the venue/digital platform was suitable for this session' were asked to provide a reason and the following comments were noted (n=8) :

- "Meeting room too small" (n=1).
- Issues with parking and traffic (n=1).
- "Online works best for this group due to the supervisor not being able to meet on time" (n=1).
- Distance to supervision too far to travel (n=1)
- Preference for face-to-face or in-person supervision (n=4).

7. *Further comments (n=1,125)*



- a. Most (75.8%) (n=857) participants had ‘no further comment’ at the end of the supervision session evaluation.
- b. A total of 21.2% (n=237) of participants expressed their ‘appreciation’ of the service.

	Sample size (n)	Percentage (%)
Excellent supervisor	114	48.1%
Good peer support	106	44.7%
Useful resources	10	4.2%
Other	7	3.0%

‘Other’ (n=6) comments of appreciation are as follows:

- “I really appreciate the professional support. It allows for great clarity, insight and advice.”
 - “Very supportive group and supervisor. I got a lot from the group – thank you.”
 - “Both the supervisor’s insight into the issue, offer of continued support for which I am grateful for. The groups support and knowledge on resources. Thank you.”
 - “Great advice and support from supervisor and peers alike.”
 - “Supervisor was available to contact outside supervision time for a concern that needed external support on.”
 - “All of the above”.
- c. Of the 31 ‘suggestions’ made, 17 requested additional sessions, 6 indicated a preference for face-to-face sessions, 8 ‘no comment’.
 - d. No final ‘concerns’ were noted.

Reflections and Observations from the National Steering Committee

The National Steering Committee has reflected on the findings and noted the following main findings with observations as appropriate.

This evaluation clearly shows that the supervision experience is highly valued as a positive experience by attending guidance counsellors. This is evident throughout the report at large and is exemplified by the 99.2% rate of agreement that the system is 'helpful and supportive.'

Some challenges and issues were noted throughout the report. While there are mechanisms currently in place to address some of the issues (for example, a group can change supervisors at the end of each academic year if preferred), other challenges have been noted and will be kept under review.

Summary of findings

The overall aim of this evaluation was to provide supervisees with an opportunity to give feedback. The survey results highlight a highly positive experience among guidance counsellors regarding the support received through guidance counselling supervision.

The *Annual Reflection on Guidance Counselling Supervision* gathered feedback from participants, showing high levels of satisfaction with the programme. The majority (81.6%) of participants expressed a desire for more supervision sessions each year. In response to the question on improving the group, 61.3% felt the group already functioned well and required no changes.

The most positive aspects of the supervision experience were identified as the support from supervisors and colleagues (58.7%) and the opportunity to share experiences (37.1%).

Most participants (66.3%) did not identify any negatives, though some felt there were not enough sessions (15.0%).

Satisfaction with online or remote supervision was also high, with 85.5% reporting overall satisfaction. When asked about format preferences, most participants preferred face-to-face or live supervision (53.8%), with a significant portion preferring a blended approach with in-person and remote options (37.6%). Nearly all participants (98.8%) were happy with their supervision group. Additional feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 79.6% of participants indicating a favourable experience, mentioning appreciation for the support and guidance provided by supervisors and peers.

The *Supervision Session Evaluation 2023-24* reflected a highly positive experience for participants, with 99.2% finding the sessions helpful and supportive. A majority (76.8%) came prepared with an issue to discuss, while 97.6% felt there was sufficient time for all issues to be addressed during the session.

Opportunities for learning were well received, with 99.5% either strongly agreeing or agreeing that their learning was maximised. Participants also felt that the group provided a balanced mix of challenge and support, with 99.8% endorsing this aspect. Additionally, 99.2% agreed that the venue or digital platform was suitable for the session, further underscoring the positive environment fostered by the programme.

A minority of participants raised concerns about logistical challenges, including long travel times, traffic, and poor attendance (either by themselves or others), as well as accessibility issues, such as a lack of online sessions. Additionally, some reported difficulties with the supervisor being out of touch or disorganised, further impacting their experience.

While the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, it is important to acknowledge the broader challenges that guidance counsellors face in their work. They frequently address issues such as mental health, career decision-making, and school refusal, with mental health concerns now surpassing career-related issues as the most prevalent (IGC 2024). Crucially, many post-primary guidance counsellors work beyond their allocated hours, and a significant proportion report insufficient time to meet students' needs (IGC 2024). Finegan (2020) also highlights the cyclical nature of the work, with students often returning for follow-up support even after being referred to external services. This multifaceted role underscores the critical importance of professional supervision in helping guidance counsellors manage their responsibilities and attend to their self-care.

Conclusions

These evaluation findings clearly endorse the supervision service for guidance counsellors based in post-primary schools, PLC and CFE settings. It can be concluded that the current level of support provided is highly valued and seen as an essential element of professional guidance counselling work, but many guidance counsellors believe more support is warranted, given the nature of the challenges faced.

Some key benefits cited by the guidance counsellors of supervision include supervisor and colleague support and the opportunity to share experiences. Collegiality and shared learning are important aspects of any supervision experience and an indication of the success of the groups.

In accordance with the report's overarching aim, the National Steering Committee will further evaluate these insights to enhance the data-gathering process and assess the programme's quality for continuous improvement.

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