



June 2021

The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) is an agency of the Irish Department of Education operating under the aegis of Léargas. The following report details the delivery of the Department-funded NCGE guidance service to those eligible Irish students who were attending a European School in 2020/21. *It is of note, that due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, service delivery in 2020 took place entirely online.*

NCGE wishes to continue to acknowledge the direction, co-operation, and genuine commitment of the Department Inspectorate in the planning and co-ordination of this service.

NCGE is very grateful to the contact teachers based in the European schools who take on the responsibility for assisting the delivery of the career guidance service provided by NCGE annually. Their assistance is critical to the delivery of this very valuable service and is completed in addition to their normal teaching responsibilities.

Furthermore, the delivery of this guidance service would not be possible without the professional dedication of qualified and highly experienced guidance counsellors and NCGE staff who commit to the delivery of high-quality guidance service to the students. I wish to thank them all for their dedication, professional and personal commitment to the process.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the NCGE staff involved in the co-ordination, planning, administration, and support of this guidance service, who each year review, consider and explore new ideas to ensure its continued professional delivery. The 2020 move to delivery online, in its entirety, was not initially envisaged, however the subsequent successful roll out of the service through that sole means is testament to their commitment in ensuring uninterrupted access to this valuable service.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer McKenzie', written in a cursive style.

Jennifer McKenzie
Director, National Centre for Guidance in Education

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1. Background

The European Schools website explains the role of European schools as follows:

'European Schools: The European Schools and the Accredited European Schools are educational institutions set up in the European Union's Member States. They provide children with a multilingual and multicultural education at nursery, primary and secondary levels. The schools follow a specific curriculum and offer the European Baccalaureate diploma.'

<https://www.eursc.eu/en>

The Irish Department of Education website outlines the entitlement of access to guidance for Irish students enrolled in European Schools as follows:

'The Department of Education provides funding for access to appropriate guidance for the children of Irish parents who are enrolled in the European Schools. This service is coordinated by the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) and is delivered by qualified guidance counsellors as recognised by the Department. The support is intended to supplement, but not replace, the guidance support already available to students in the European Schools. It is geared specifically to the needs of Irish students who may be considering applying to Irish third-level institutions and who have questions regarding general entry requirements, course requirements, and application procedures and deadlines. The service is provided in the autumn term each year. In European Schools with larger numbers of Irish students - usually the schools in Brussels and Luxembourg - an Irish guidance counsellor visits the school. The guidance counsellor generally meets with each Year 7 student individually, and, as appropriate, with groups from Years 4, 5 and 6. In some cases, the guidance counsellor also meets with parents of Year 7 on a designated evening during the visit.

In the case of schools with smaller numbers of Irish students, an Irish guidance counsellor provides online guidance service by means of Skype or an equivalent system, by prior arrangement with the school. The service is provided to Year 7 students and, as appropriate, to students from Years 5 and 6.

Information on equivalences between the EB and national systems can be found in a document published annually on the ES website. Information is also available on the website of the Central Applications Office <http://www.cao.ie/>.'

<https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/International/information-note-for-parents-on-the-european-schools.pdf>

As an agency of the Department, NCGE also hosts the Euroguidance Centre for Ireland. Euroguidance is co-funded by the European Commission to promote learning opportunities and mobility across Europe. NCGE coordinates guidance provisions to students in European Schools under the 'banner' of Euroguidance Ireland.

Whilst delivery is funded by the Department, NCGE has co-ordinated the delivery of the guidance service, on behalf of the Department, to European Schools for over 16 years. Each year, NCGE liaises with the relevant Senior Inspector (Inspectorate European Schools) in the Department, to access the details of the eligible European Schools and the associated student numbers requiring guidance provision. NCGE contracts qualified experienced guidance counsellors to provide this service each year.

Each year, NCGE meet with the Senior Inspector to review the guidance service provision to the European Schools, and to decide on and make changes to delivery, as appropriate, based on this review.

Traditionally delivery is made both on site in the European Schools **and** via an online video conferencing-based system. Delivery comprises one-to-one and group guidance and information sessions for students, with parents of senior (S6/S7) students also facilitated to be in attendance.

In 2020 the unexpected arrival of the global COVID-19 pandemic brought forward plans for the service and shortened the development timeline. In autumn 2020, this service was delivered to nearly 100 students, for the first time ever, entirely online. The transition involved:

- The development of a new student guidance (online) portal
- The creation and integration of an online booking facility ('Calendly')
- The use and integration of the online platform 'Zoom' for delivery
- Intensive adapted communication with school contact teachers, students and their parents
- The expansion of the guidance team for delivery
- The provision of additional training for the guidance team and resources regarding the European School system, the European Baccalaureate, the new student portal and the use of 'Zoom'.
- The provision of a substantial number of additional resources and an FAQ section to enable students and their parents prepare for their scheduled (online) guidance sessions
- The facility for in-time confidential guidance data-gathering and the generation of specific reports of the service delivery

See: www.euroguidance.ie/european-schools

2. Staffing

Coordinating staff of NCGE in 2020:

Jennifer Mc Kenzie	Director, NCGE
Orla Ní Cheallaigh	Guidance Officer - Euroguidance
David Cullen	Communications Officer, NCGE

Guidance Counsellors who delivered the service in 2020 (contracted undertaking):

In 2020, to plan for the online delivery of the guidance service, NCGE recruited suitably qualified guidance counsellors from within the Panel of External Experts contracted to NCGE.

Ms Julie	McDermott
Ms Claire	Considine
Mr Seamus	Byrne

Coordinating teachers in each school in 2020 (voluntary undertaking):

School	Coordinator
Alicante	Maria Goertz
Bergen	Roger Mattingly
Brussels 1	Aoife Whelan
Brussels 2	Barry Kilgannon
Brussels 3	Maeve Hayden
Brussels 4	Yvonne Finnan
Frankfurt	Daniel Nolan
Karlsruhe	Anthony Boothroyd
Luxembourg 1	Sinéad O'Donovan
Luxembourg 2	Grainne Kelly
Mol	Majella O'Brien
Munich	Liam Tyers
Varese	Mairéad Young

3. Service preparation

The following provides an outline of the NCGE-coordinated administration, preparation, and delivery of the guidance service.

Each year, the Department Inspectorate corresponds with the European School Directors to introduce NCGE / Euroguidance Ireland and invites co-operation and support for the coordination and delivery of the Irish European Schools guidance service.

In 2020, NCGE contracted the development of a bespoke '[Student Appointment Portal](#)'. This portal was 'live' from October 2020. It gathered information directly from students, furnishing the appointed guidance counsellors with advance information in relation to specific students' guidance needs prior to delivery. This new system also enabled parents of those students less than 16 years of age to provide recorded permission/consent for their son/daughter to attend the one-to-one and/or group sessions. The portal was linked to a 'Calendly' booking system whereby students could select suitable dates/times to receive the service. The portal further enabled both guidance counsellors and NCGE to communicate more effectively.

Three guidance counsellors were directly contracted by NCGE to deliver the guidance to students to the 13 European Schools in 2020 (an increase of 1 when compared to 2019).

3.1 Provision of resources

As highlighted, NCGE communicates the delivery of this service to schools, students, and parents under the 'banner' of Euroguidance Ireland. Relevant information is therefore made available through a dedicated section on the [Euroguidance Ireland website](#).

This information is revised annually by NCGE and includes:

- General guidelines for Irish European Baccalaureate students applying to study in Ireland
- A student appointment booking system
- Other Information (and links) about studying in Ireland.

Due to the continuation of the global pandemic, there was provision of a substantial number of [additional resources](#) and an [FAQ section](#) to enable students and their parents prepare for their scheduled guidance sessions. In addition, guides to the new student portal and using Zoom were provided to students / parents.

3.2 Activity timeline:

ACTION	UNDERTAKEN BY	DATE(S)
Development and testing of NEW student appointment portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCGE • Salespulse (contractor) 	August – October 2020
Development of additional resources and portal / Zoom 'how to' guides for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCGE 	September / October 2020
Provision of data to NCGE regarding the projected numbers and locations of eligible students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspectorate • European School Deputy Directors 	September / October 2020
e-mail to contact teachers outlining the proposed schedule of delivery and revised information on the appointment process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCGE • European School contact teachers 	October 2020
Drafting and signing of contracts by guidance counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCGE • Guidance Counsellors 	October - November 2020
Collation of student appointments and parental permissions through NEW portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCGE • Students • Parents 	October - November 2020
Coordination of guidance counsellor rota for delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCGE • Guidance Counsellors 	October - November 2020
Ongoing communication with guidance counsellors, contact teachers, students and parents in lead-up to delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCGE • Guidance Counsellors • Contact Teachers • Students • Parents 	October - November 2020

3.3 Guidance Counsellor preparation

NCGE furnished relevant resources to guidance counsellors in advance and in preparation for delivery, these included:

- Links to the updated Euroguidance Ireland dedicated European Schools resources and FAQs
- Agreed (HEA) entry requirements for EU/EFTA applicants
- Details pertaining to the European Schools Curriculum and assessment system

Prior to delivery guidance counsellors refreshed their knowledge pertaining to:

- CAO / Leaving Certificate entry requirements
- HPAT requirements
- HEAR / DARE requirements and process
- Available 3rd party research tools (Qualifax, CareersPortal etc.)

The recruitment of two new guidance counsellors for the provision of the guidance service required intensive training sessions and information documents on the use of the NEW student portal and on the use of Zoom.

4. Service Delivery

As highlighted, delivery took place entirely online through use of the 'Zoom' platform.

In line with the Department commitment, NCGE communicated our willingness (on behalf of the guidance counsellors) to meet (virtually) with the parents of individual students when requested. **22 x parents availed of this opportunity in 2020.**

A total of 53 individual guidance sessions took place and 16 group sessions.

- Delivery dates were between the 2nd of November and 1st of December 2020
- All appointments were arranged outside of school hours due to the changes in the European Schools' delivery of normal curriculum online during school hours
- All guidance appointments were booked via the new platform and accessed via Zoom on the evening selected.
Any student with a specific learning difficulty that would make it difficult for them to engage with online guidance provision was asked to indicate this on their booking form and additional arrangements made as appropriate.
- Group meetings were organised for S4 and S5 students. These were not school specific.
Students from any of the 13 European Schools were invited to join these meetings in groups of 10-12 maximum.
- Group sessions were facilitated by 2 x guidance counsellors utilising 'break out rooms' (to sub divide the attending cohort further into groups of 5-6).
- S6 and S7 students were offered individual consultations
- Parents of S6 and S7 students were invited to attend the final 10 minutes of their child's guidance appointment, if desired.
- S7 students were granted an opportunity to book a follow up session in January 2021

4.1 Delivery statistics

PROJECTED eligible students¹ - returned directly by schools for service by end October 2020

School	S4	S5	S6	S7	TOTALS
Alicante	2	4	2	2	10
Bergen	0	1	2	1	4
Brussels 1	3	7	6	6	22
Brussels 11	5	8	1	6	20
Brussels 111	8	11	9	6	34
Brussels IV	7	6	12	7	32
Frankfurt	5	2	3	2	12
Karlsruhe	1	1	2	0	4
Luxembourg 1	6	1	4	3	14
Luxembourg 11	1	1	3	1	6
Mol	3	2	1	2	8
Munich	5	5	4	4	18
Varese	0	2	2	2	6
TOTALS	46	51	51	42	190

¹Eligible students from each school are those who have at least one Irish parent and are in years S4-S7 each year.

ACTUAL student numbers in receipt of delivery²

SCHOOL	Projected	Actual	%	S7	S6	S5	S4
Alicante	10	4	40	1	0	3	0
Bergen	4	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Brussels 1	22	12	55	4	3	3	2
Brussels 2	20	4	20	2	0	0	2
Brussels 3	34	17	50	4	4	5	4
Brussels 4	32	23	72	3	11	4	5
Frankfurt	12	8	67	0	5	2	1
Karlsruhe	4	2	50	0	2	0	0
Luxembourg 1	14	6	43	2	2	0	2
Luxembourg 2	6	5	83	2	1	1	1
Mol	8	3	38	0	0	1	2
Munich	18	6	33	1	3	0	2
Varese	6	5	83	1	2	2	0
TOTALS	190	95	50%	20	33	21	21

²The final numbers of recipients do not directly correlate with the projected number as not all eligible students seek guidance nor are all students in a position to attend any of the guidance session(s) scheduled.

5. Guidance Counsellor Reporting

As part of utilisation and integration of the NEW platform, guidance counsellors recorded their meeting notes online within the portal directly. What follows is a summary of these reports.

5.1 S4 & S5 (Group Sessions)

Within this cohort of students the work consists of having students consider their selection of subjects and ultimately a course or career. These sessions can be more than information-seeking but also include looking at self, hobbies and interests, favourite subjects, role models in their lives, stated parental wishes for them, preferred work environments and current levels of knowledge about their stated fields of work. Students are encouraged to conduct broad-based research on areas of interest to avoid premature decision-making.

SOME common topics raised by students as part of 2020 GROUP sessions:

Not in order of commonality

- Their current general areas of interest
- Choice of career paths
- Appropriate subject choice and how to research appropriately
- Process of applying to college in Ireland
- Life on campus in Ireland (including sports and other facilities)
- Points conversion from EB to Irish System
- Ranking of Irish universities (on a world scale)
- Differences between IoT and a university

SOME current areas of interest of further study mentioned by students as part of 2020 GROUP sessions:

- Art
- Animal Care
- Neurology
- Mathematics
- Science
- Film Studies
- Sociology
- Psychology
- Law
- Zoology
- Journalism
- Computer Science
- Engineering
- Architecture
- Music
- Teaching

Several students who had detailed or specific questions were subsequently contacted by the guidance counsellor. This consisted of information such as accessing the presentation(s) delivered, more about points equivalences and sports scholarship opportunities available.

5.2 S6 & S7 (Individual Sessions)

Within this cohort, traditionally S6 students are encouraged to attend open days and obtain work experience in their chosen field to broaden their knowledge of their fields of interest and anchor their choices before year 7. Of necessity, much of the work with S7 consists of explaining the detail of the application procedures to the CAO.

SOME common topics raised by students as part of 2020 INDIVIDUAL sessions:

Not in order of commonality

- DARE process
- Post Leaving Cert (PLC) / Further Education and Training (FET) Options
- HPAT process and individual college subject requirements (for medicine)
- Points conversion from EB to Irish System
 - Impact of 'new' EB marking scheme on points conversions
 - Variances between TCD and other universities
- Available 'virtual' open days
- How the CAO 'works'
- Sports scholarships
- Accommodation options and general costs and fees
- Differences between IoTs and universities
- Ranking of Irish universities (on a world scale)
- Points v Subject Requirements
- Post graduate options

SOME current areas of interest of further study mentioned by students as part of 2020 INDIVIDUAL sessions:

- Psychology
- Physiotherapy
- Sports Science / Marine Science / Biology / Chemistry / Mathematics
- International Relations
- Communications
- Architecture
- Medicine
- Humanities
- Engineering
- Multimedia / Film Production
- Food Science / Nutrition
- Business / Marketing
- Law
- Fashion
- Zoology
- Urban Planning
- Pharmacy

Several students who had detailed or specific questions were subsequently contacted by the guidance counsellor. This consisted of information such as accessing more on the HPAT process, the DARE application procedure (for students with disabilities), accessing the presentation(s) delivered and more about points equivalences.

5.3 General observations

- A significant number of students (from both session types) have already undertaken significant research with regard their career and further area of study
- It is clear from student's interactions that the conversion process of points for entry and additional course requirements are still challenges for their comprehension, as is the difference in requirements and points calculation between Trinity College Dublin and other Universities and colleges
- Medicine is a very common field of study aspired to
- Trinity College Dublin ranks consistently high in students first choice of university in Ireland

6. Future Service Delivery

In early 2020 NCGE/Euroguidance Ireland commissioned an independent external review of the Irish Guidance Service to the European Schools. This review incorporated feedback from students and their parents, European School Directors, European School 'Contact Teachers', the Irish Department of Education and NCGE / Euroguidance Ireland staff. Intended as an internal document; the feedback has provided valuable insights into the views and needs of all stakeholders. The review will inform the ongoing progression of the service.

A key feature and benefit of the utilisation of the NEW student portal is the ability to have a confidential GDPR compliant record of student's previous appointment detail and the associated information furnished to them by a guidance counsellor as part of their guidance session. This will greatly enhance the quality and efficiency of the continued guidance sessions delivered to any given student in subsequent years.

6.1 Specific additional feedback with regard 2020 service delivery

Feedback on the service and the additional resources provided was extremely positive from students, parents, contact teachers and guidance counsellors.

The below were highlighted as being worthy of additional consideration in planning the service for 2021.

- Potential service delivery to earlier year groups (S3)
- Facilitate sessions of a longer duration
- Consider the impact of Brexit on 'non-Irish' ES students wishing to study in an English language location and consider whether a service could be provided to these.

6.2 Student destination survey

In review of the 2018 service and planning for the 2019 service, NCGE commenced surveying **former S7** students (and their parents / guardians) who had accessed the guidance services. Again in 2019, on registration for the ES Guidance service, students were asked for their permission to contact them post- graduation to gather data on their education, training or employment destinations.

In September 2020 NCGE contacted 38 such former S7 students and their parent(s) / guardian(s) to ascertain their location and choice of further study.

On publication of this 2020 summary report, 7 x individual responses have been received.

- 6 stated that they were currently studying in Ireland.
- 1 stated that they were currently studying in another EU country.

Those studying in Ireland were enrolled on courses in the following areas:

- Sports Management / Coaching
- History / Political Science
- History / German
- Architecture
- Law (and French)
- Business Economics and Social Studies

NCGE will continue to survey the destination choices for future S7 'leavers', including those graduating from European Schools in 2021.

In keeping with current practice, the Department and NCGE review of service delivery in 2020 will inform planning for the delivery of the European Schools Guidance Service in 2021

Further information on the European Schools Guidance Service is available from NCGE [HERE](#)