

GHANA YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS – PAN-AFRICAN COALITION FOR TRANSFORMATION

# NEWSLETTER

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## Call for a National Guidance and Counseling Policy for Ghana's Future

### The time for a National Guidance and Counseling Policy is NOW!

**Guidance and counseling (G&C) are fundamental to the holistic development of individuals, providing them with the awareness, skills, and resilience to navigate academic, personal, and professional life.**

In an era of rapid global change, the role of G&C within Ghana's education sector is essential for fostering well-adjusted, informed, and productive citizens. However, the lack of a comprehensive, adequately resourced, and effectively implemented national framework has long hampered the systematic provision of these vital services.

The call for a robust National Guidance and Counseling Policy is not new, resonating for years among educators, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international partners. Recent statements on the subject include that of the Ga East Municipal Director

of Education, Deborah Ampofo, who noted in May 2024 the indispensable role of G&C, and the call for a national policy by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Environment and Sustainable Development, (UESD), Prof. Eric Nyarko-Sampson in April 2023. However, despite G&C units existing in schools since the late 1970s, the absence of an overarching, adequately funded, and consistently implemented national policy has led to fragmented and under-resourced services.

This urgent need for G&C is amplified by Ghana's current challenges: youth unemployment, a skills gap, particularly for digital and green economies, and the need to improve educational outcomes and student well-being. Effective G&C is crucial for guiding students towards future-ready career paths, making the policy an investment in Ghana's human capital. This newsletter consolidates evidence and stakeholder experiences to argue for the immediate approval and implementation of the National Guidance and Counseling Policy. Inaction risks exacerbating the challenges noted above and impeding Ghana's progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The time for decisive action is now.

## Voices from the ground: why students need guidance more than ever

The educational journey presents numerous challenges that are often magnified by inadequate support systems. The experiences of Ghanaian students highlight a critical need for accessible and professional guidance and counseling.

### The student experience: navigating academic, personal, and career crossroads

Ghanaian students face diverse pressures related to academic performance, study habits, and exam stress. Many struggle with their choice of courses due to a lack of educational guidance and career information, leading to frustration. External pressures often compound these struggles after university enrollment. Students also require support for social adjustment, interpersonal relationships, and self-understanding. Cases of stress, anxiety, and even substance abuse are common among students.

While the desire for counseling is strong, students emphasize the need for **confidentiality, a private setting, and professional counselors**. This suggests a potential lack of trust in current G&C structures, where personnel (often teachers with dual roles) may not be perceived as having specialized skills or the necessary detachment. This perception can deter students from seeking help. The wide range of student needs—academic, vocational, personal-social, and health—demands a structured approach from trained professionals.

The National Pre-tertiary Education Curriculum Framework outlines comprehensive school counseling programs, but a significant gap exists between this ideal and current practice, as shown by inadequately met needs for guidance on study habits and educational information. These unmet needs contribute to poor academic choices and underperformance, limiting individual potential and national human resource capacity.

### Focus on female TVET students: breaking barriers, building futures

The technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector is vital for Ghana's economy, and interested female students face distinct challenges requiring targeted guidance. Young women are underrepresented in many TVET fields, in line with their limited presence in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) areas. Barriers include systemic issues, insufficient institutional support, societal stereotypes, and a lack of specific interventions.

Negative stereotypes about women's capabilities in male-dominated trades also persist, with some parents believing such work hinders childbirth. Addressing these harmful views requires proactive and sensitive G&C that has proven crucial for improving young women's agency in STEM-related TVET choices. Awareness-building and confidence-boosting initiatives are needed within TVET institutions in order to dismantle stereotypes, showcase female role models, and provide psychosocial support.

Such interventions can be powerful. Abiba Ayishetu, for example, 23-year-old from Nima in Greater Accra, had strong initial reluctance to pursuing vocational training due to prevailing societal views of TVET as a path for the "uneducated". However, she received good counseling, went into TVET and later set up Abiba Couture & Wigs, a social enterprise that trains and mentors young women. A different example is the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), a pan-African organization that supports girls to finish school and become leaders and agents of change.

This is why we call for "gender equality in skills development", which necessitates robust G&C for female TVET students. While resilient, these students need enabling environments to realize their potential. G&C can empower them to overcome barriers and make informed choices. Empowering female students in TVET is an equity and economic imperative, expanding the skilled labor pool and contributing to individual, household and national prosperity.

## Views from the frontline: teachers and counselors on the G&C gap

Teachers and dedicated guidance personnel offer critical insights into the operational realities and systemic deficiencies hindering effective G&C in Ghanaian schools. Their experiences reveal a significant gap between the recognized need for these services and the capacity to provide them.

From the **teachers' perspective**, a primary challenge is assigning G&C responsibilities to educators with full teaching loads. Angel Carbonu, President of the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT), questions the feasibility of meaningful counseling from teachers teaching 30 hours per week. Augustina Dadebo, a counseling psychologist and Assistant Registrar of the University of Professional Studies, notes that these teachers prioritize evaluated teaching duties while sidelining G&C. This results in insufficient time for counseling, teachers who often lack specialized training in G&C, and blurred roles that can undermine student trust. Teachers also report insufficient administrative support and limited professional development opportunities. Despite these obstacles, many recognize the importance of G&C, like Mr. Agbeko from Agbakope in the Volta Region, a teacher mentor who volunteers to assist students.

**Counselors and G&C coordinators** describe a stark resource deficit. A study by Gabriel Amponsah Adu on problems facing guidance and counseling centers in public universities of Ghana, found unanimous agreement on the inadequate numbers of counselors, leading to overburdened staff and long waits for counseling. Funding is a critical constraint, with insufficient resources for outreach, seminars, and basic logistics. The lack of private offices, internet access for online counseling and essential materials such as counseling handbooks further constrains service delivery.

These limitations are critical barriers to providing even basic G&C, let alone comprehensive programs like the four-component model (guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support) of the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NaCCA). Counselors also grapple with the perceived lack of confidentiality that deters student engagement. Some coordinators admit their services have "weak cutting edges", indicating impact limitations. Chronic under-resourcing and the de-professionalization of G&C roles risk burnout among dedicated staff and deprive students of critical support.

The following table summarizes key challenges:

**Table 1: Key challenges in guidance and counseling provision in Ghana**

Challenge	Description
<b>Lack of professional, full-time counselors</b>	Many G&C roles are filled by teachers with heavy teaching loads.
<b>Inadequate funding</b>	G&C operations and programs lack sufficient financial resources
<b>Inadequate facilities</b>	Private offices, materials, and reliable internet are lacking.
<b>Heavy teaching workload</b>	Teachers prioritize teaching over G&C duties.
<b>Lack of student trust/confidentiality</b>	Concerns about confidentiality deter students from using G&C services.
<b>Inadequate professional development</b>	There are limited training opportunities for G&C providers.

## Connecting the dots: G&C, TVET, and Ghana's economic future

**Strengthening guidance and counseling is crucial for Ghana's economic development, especially in relation to TVET and youth employment. This is why our May 2024 YES-PACT Ghana Newsletter emphasized navigating the digital and ecological transitions of work, a goal for which effective G&C is a fundamental enabler.**

Over time, a robust G&C system can help mitigate the major youth employment challenges of skills mismatches, gaps, and shortages. By providing information on emerging job markets and aligning aptitudes with TVET pathways, G&C can help equip youth with future-ready skills. However, the TVET sector itself faces G&C deficiencies. TVET institutions often lack dedicated career guidance, trained teachers, logistics, and funding. This contributes to students being ill-prepared for some jobs and careers, leading to underemployment or skills mismatches. Negative public perceptions also deter potential TVET entrants. Comprehensive G&C is vital for promoting the value of TVET among students and parents.

The Ghana TVET Service (GTVETS) has a Guidance, Career Counseling and School Health Unit to develop

standards and build capacity. The Commission for TVET (CTVET) also plays a promotional role, with increased TVET enrollment reported. The National Apprenticeship Policy aims to enhance skills and female participation through effective career guidance. Despite these efforts, parental advice often outweighs formal guidance in TVET-related student choices. While valuable, this reliance can perpetuate biases. Students are motivated by practical skills and self-employment prospects but are demotivated by negative perceptions and program costs. Engaging parents in formal career guidance is now strongly recommended, along with better teacher training for balanced TVET advice.

Increased TVET enrollment and the Free TVET policy are signs of progress, but the quality of student choices and career success depend on G&C efficacy. Current weaknesses mean enrollment may not translate into optimal skills alignment or career satisfaction. The YES-PACT newsletter's emphasis on "core employability skills" (such as teamwork and communication) also points to a need for G&C beyond career matching, as these are addressed in comprehensive frameworks such as that of the NaCCA. Ghana's TVET vision requires systematically integrating and resourcing G&C services in all TVET institutions to ensure investments yield desired outcomes.

The following table illustrates how effectively G&C can address key challenges within TVET:

**Table 2: Aligning G&C with TVET for Ghana's future workforce**

Key challenge from YES-PACT	How effectively G&C addresses it	Current G&C gap in TVET
Skills mismatch, gaps, shortages	Provides career information; aligns skills with industry needs	Inadequate number of dedicated counselors in many TVET institutions
Skills obsolescence	Promotes lifelong learning; guides upskilling	Limited continuous career development guidance
Gender disparity in TVET	Challenges stereotypes; offers support for females in non-traditional trades	Insufficiently targeted G&C for female students
Negative perception of TVET	Promotes value of TVET; dispels myths	Lack of systematic G&C efforts to counteract stigma
Need for core employability skills	Facilitates development of personal-social skills	G&C often narrowly focused, not holistic

# The policy imperative: charting a course for effective national G&C

**Ghana has seen foundational efforts and strategic plans to establish a robust guidance and counseling system, yet a significant gap persists between aspiration and reality. This underscores the critical need for a comprehensive, enforceable, and adequately resourced National Guidance and Counseling Policy.**

Historically, G&C services were formally introduced in second-cycle schools in November 1976 and basic schools in April 1982. The Ghana Education Service (GES) established a G&C Unit with a national-to-district structure. Ministry of Education (MoE) policy documents (e.g., 2018) have emphasized the integration of G&C into the curriculum, including life skills and support for vulnerable children. The National Pre-tertiary Education Curriculum Framework outlines "Four Components of a Comprehensive School Counseling Programme": guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support. These provide a solid foundation for a national policy.

With support from partners such as CAMFED and the Mastercard Foundation, Ghana launched a five-year G&C Strategic Plan (2018-2022), developing resources such as a Teacher Mentor Training Manual. Despite such efforts, challenges persist. In 2021, NAGRAT President Angel Carbonu stated, "There is no effective guidance and counseling system in the GES". Professor Nyarko-Sampson highlighted issues like the shortage of professional counselors, inadequate funding, lack of public awareness, and insufficient motivation for G&C providers. These shortcomings suggest a failure in consistent, resourced implementation, which a new national policy must address.

In 2023, UNICEF supported the MoE and GES to strengthen skills and career counseling via a Guidance and Counselling Policy (Pre-Tertiary). However, details on this policy's content, status, and relationship with broader national policy are unclear. The GES 2024 and 2025 Right to Information Manuals indicate ongoing reforms, including a new Management Service

Division to house G&C, but clarity on the UNICEF-supported policy is vital for targeted advocacy.

A transformative National Guidance and Counseling Policy must be visionary yet pragmatic. It must address systemic issues: inadequate funding with specific budget lines; the shortage of *professional, full-time counselors* distinct from teachers; lack of appropriate facilities; and the need for continuous professional development. The policy must mandate clear structures and roles, ensuring G&C is integral, not ancillary. It must guarantee comprehensive services addressing academic, career, and personal-social needs, underpinned by robust monitoring and evaluation while also upholding confidentiality. Successful approval and implementation could catalyze educational reform and position Ghana as a leader in human capital development.

The core components of a comprehensive G&C program are:

## **The Four Pillars of Effective School Counseling (based on the NaCCA Framework )**

- Guidance curriculum:** systematic G&C content for all students (notably for decision making and career awareness).
- Individual student planning:** assisting students with education/career planning and goal setting.
- Responsive services:** addressing immediate student concerns (such as counseling, crisis intervention).
- System support:** managing the G&C program, consulting with stakeholders, staff development.

## Stakeholder spotlight: perspectives from education leaders and policymakers

**The call for a robust National Guidance and Counseling Policy resonates across Ghana's education sector, with leaders, policymakers, and partners acknowledging its importance. However, translating recognition into systemic change requires concerted effort and resources.**

**Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service views:** Education officials increasingly recognize G&C's critical role. In May 2024, Ga East Municipal Director of Education Eric Sey urged schools to embrace G&C for a "better, safer and more inclusive learning environment". The Ashanti Regional Director of Education, Dr. Kwame Amankra Appiah, described G&C as a "lifelong process" crucial for diverse student needs and empowerment. In 2022, the GES National Director of G&C, Mrs. Gifty Sekyi-Bremansu, spoke of enhancing the unit to conform to international best practices.

Despite these sentiments, systemic challenges, especially funding and professionalization of counselors, suggest a disconnect between operational recognition and national-level resource allocation. While the MoE's 2024 budget includes broad objectives like inclusive education, specific G&C funding remains a concern. The GES plan for

a Management Service Division to house G&C is positive but needs adequate resources. Counselor Augustina Dadebo's May 2024 call for a policy detaching counseling from teaching and establishing dedicated units with full-time professionals highlights a key practitioner concern.

**Role of development partners and civil society organizations:** Partners like ACET (through the YES-PACT), CAMFED, Mastercard Foundation, and UNICEF have been instrumental. CAMFED and Mastercard supported the 2018-2022 G&C Strategic Plan, developing teacher mentoring programs. UNICEF and the YES-PACT supported the MoE in 2023 with the development of the Guidance and Counseling Policy (Pre-Tertiary) and advocates for education funding. This involvement underscores G&C's importance and the actual and potential resource gaps within the government. Sustainable national G&C requires robust domestic ownership and funding. Ghanaian CSOs are pivotal in advocating for quality education and policy implementation, and a concerted effort is needed for the approval and rollout of the G&C policy.

**Parliamentary and governmental role:** The government and Parliament hold ultimate responsibility for approving, legislating, and funding a National G&C Policy. Key institutional stakeholders include the MoE and Parliament. Advocacy must engage these bodies to ensure technical soundness, legislative support, and, crucially, an adequate financial allocation from the Ministry of Finance. CSOs are well-positioned to lead this multi-level advocacy, ensuring the call for a functional G&C system is acted upon at the highest levels.

## Call to action: Let's champion a National G&C Policy for Ghana's youth

**A brighter future for Ghana's youth and sustained national progress virtually depend on improving the quality of an education system in which effective guidance and counseling is central. This newsletter has highlighted the urgent need, benefits, and**

**existing frameworks for a comprehensive National G&C Policy. It is time for decisive action.**

A well-resourced and effectively implemented National G&C Policy will improve academic achievement, foster informed career decisions aligned with national needs (especially in TVET and digital/green economies), enhance student well-being, promote gender equity (particularly in STEM and TVET), and cultivate a professional G&C workforce.

To achieve this, collective effort is paramount. We call for urgent action by the following:

- **Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service:** urgently finalize, approve, and disseminate the National G&C Policy, clarifying the status of existing drafts such as the UNICEF-supported Guidance and Counseling Policy (Pre-Tertiary). They should also publish a detailed, costed implementation plan with dedicated budgets; mandate recruitment of professional, full-time counselors, and raise resources for adequate facilities.
- **Parliament and the government of Ghana:** provide legislative backing and ensure sustainable, adequate budget allocations for policy implementation, recognizing G&C as a critical investment.
- **TVET providers (GTVETS, CTVET, institutions):** champion and integrate comprehensive G&C in all TVET institutions, focusing on industry-relevant career guidance, psychosocial support, and addressing negative perceptions of TVET; implement targeted G&C for female students.

- **Teachers and school leaders:** cultivate supportive environments for G&C. Collaborate with and advocate for G&C personnel, resources, and dedicated time.
- **Practicing counselors and G&C coordinators:** continue advocating for professionalization, uniform standards, development opportunities, and resources; share best practices.
- **Civil society organizations and development partners:** sustain advocacy for approval, funding, and implementation of the National G&C policy; support capacity building, and partner with the government for rollout and monitoring.
- **Students:** engage with G&C services and voice your needs.
- **Parents:** support student access to G&C, explore diverse career paths including TVET, and collaborate with schools.

Approving the National G&C Policy is the first step; its success lies in sustained, effective implementation with adequate resourcing and collective commitment. This is an investment in Ghana's youth and future.

## Let's champion this cause to nurture Ghana's next generations!

The Pan-African Coalition for Transformation (PACT) is a platform that seeks to bridge and close gaps between policy design and implementation. The Youth Employment and Skills (YES) PACT has six Chapters in Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, Rwanda, and Uganda. Read more about the YES-PACT at [acetforafrica.org/yes-pact](http://acetforafrica.org/yes-pact)

Author	Eric Saforo, Team Lead, Skills and Innovation, Youth Opportunity and Transformation in Africa
Contributors	<p>Godwin Yao Doe, Delegate of Young Diplomat of Ghana (Cohort V)</p> <p>Sedinam Botwe Esq., Delegate of Young Diplomat of Ghana (Cohort V)</p> <p>Dr. Emmanuel Delali Faryosey, Delegate of Young Diplomat of Ghana (Cohort V)</p> <p>Anne-Marie Provençal, Delegate of Young Diplomat of Ghana (Cohort V)</p>