DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is all my own work and has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree in this University or any other University.

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A Study of the Comparative Experiences of LCVP in Selected

Schools.

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ABSTRACT

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is part of a range of curriculum reform at Senior Cycle. This dissertation explores the issues arising from the introduction and implementation of the LCVP into a selected number of schools with a particular focus on Saint Anne's, the target school.

In order to get a clear picture of the situation in these schools, a semi-structured interview was held with the Co-ordinator of each programme. This instrument was chosen as the most productive research approach since each co-ordinator, in theory, would be familiar with all aspects of the programme. In addition one of the Development Officers on the LCVP Support Team was interviewed in depth. The purpose of this interview was to gain an insight on implementation from a national perspective. Finally it was considered valuable to get the perspective of students as well as teachers. These consisted of two distinct groups, firstly Fifth Year students in the target school who had opted for the programme and secondly their peers who had decided against the programme or had not been eligible for inclusion. Their opinions were elicited by means of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

The object of the research was to identify in what way the experience of the target school echoed that of the other schools and what factors were peculiar to Saint Anne's. The introductory chapters of this dissertation set the context for the work by describing the changes in second-level education in Ireland since the sixties, emphasising particularly the growing pressure in the early 1990s to develop the vocational dimension of education. Some of the curricular initiatives introduced to address this need are described and the suite of programmes that emerged at Senior Cycle is presented with a particular emphasis on the rationale, content and assessment procedures of the LCVP. The focus of the research is then narrowed by describing the target school in some detail, particularly its experience of vocational initiatives and its involvement in curriculum innovation.

The main body of the work analyses the experience of the four control schools in relation to that of the target school. A number of themes, identifying points of similarity and contrast between the target school and the others, are employed for comparative purposes. In addition, student responses are classified and analysed. All this information is set in a national context by the observations of the Development Officer.

Finally the research sets these results in the context of the general literature of curriculum innovation. It concludes by offering some comments on the experience of the LCVP in the target school and implications for future policy.

INTRODUCTION

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is part of a range of curriculum reform at Senior Cycle. An earlier version of this programme was offered in a limited number of schools from September 1989 while the Revised Version, which is the object of this research, was introduced in a number of phases since 1994. Phase One (September 1994) started with 1,200 students in 68 schools. The numbers involved have increased each year with 26,500 students in 462 schools participating by 1998. This dissertation concerns the introduction of the LCVP into a Phase 5 school. The school in question, Saint Anne's, where the researcher is employed as a teacher, provided an initial focus for the research.

The experience of the school with the programme is analysed in the context of a selected number of other schools. The object of the research is to identify in what way the experience of the target school matches that of the other schools and what factors were peculiar to Saint Anne's. Finally the research sets these results in the context of the general literature of Curriculum Innovation.

The research is set out as follows: Chapter One explores the changes in Second-Level Education in Ireland since the sixties with a particular emphasis on the growing pressure to include a vocational dimension. Some of the curricular initiatives introduced to address this need are described. Chapter Two focuses more specifically on the suite of programmes now available at Senior Cycle with a particular emphasis on the rationale, content and assessment procedures of the LCVP. Chapter Three describes the target school in some detail, emphasising its vocational initiatives and its experience of curriculum innovation. Chapter Four discusses the research methodology used to gather the information examined in this

dissertation. Chapter Five analyses the data generated, under a certain number of themes, identifying points of similarity and contrast between the target school and the others. Chapter Six sets these conclusions in a more general context and identifies the policy implications for the target school and for the national implementation of a programme such as the LCVP.

CHAPTER ONE

Developments in Senior Cycle Education Since the Sixties.

Introduction

In 1921 the Dail Commission on Secondary Education was set up to investigate the kind of secondary education required for the new state. Its recommendations formed the basis for the new programme for secondary schools that came into operation on 1 August 1924. The Department of Education described this as a complete reform of the secondary programme.[1] Subsequently some changes in the rules and programmes and in provisions for examinations were made and these were contained in a revised programme that came into operation in 1939. In many ways, however, the revised programme remained the same as the one introduced in 1924. Following this revised programme there followed a period of 'calm and inactivity for a full quarter of a century' [2] before any further significant change was proposed. This inertia was demonstrated in the report of the Council of Education in 1962 that showed that there had been little change in the intervening time.

> Not only did it show that the curriculum and examinations had changed only in details since 1924 but...the report clearly demonstrated that the Council did not consider that there was any great need for change.3

The report marked the end of this era of inactivity since shortly after its publication the pressures for change became overwhelming. It would be fair to say that since the early sixties the secondary system has seen a period of great discussion and change, a process that is continuing. This chapter endeavours to give an overview of the major elements of curricular change during this time.

In 1964 there was a total of slightly over 25,000 pupils in senior cycle post-primary education. With the introduction of free education this number has greatly increased as by 1996/97 (the last year for which there are official figures) there was a total of 371,184 students enrolled at post-primary level[4]. In 1999 there are 64,761 students entered for the Leaving Certificate and 64,823 scheduled to take the Junior Certificate[5]. In 1964 it was estimated that only 44% of pupils finished Junior Cycle whereas by the mid nineties over 75% were completing senior cycle[6] and the Government has set an official target of a 90% completion rate for senior cycle post-primary by the year 2000[7]. The targets of the education component of the 1997 National Anti-Poverty Strategy go even further:

- Eradication of early school-leaving before the Junior Certificate.
- Increasing Leaving Cert. participation rates to 90% by the year 2000 and 98% by 2007[8]

It is admitted that these targets are unlikely to be met. One of the reasons for this is the improved economic climate with the increased availability of work for young people. It is hardly surprising that the incentive of a job and salary allied to the feelings of self worth these engender should prove irresistible to young people whose experience of school is one of failure and alienation. The great vulnerability of such young people to changes in the economic climate, however, does give cause for concern.

Much of the discussion relating to senior cycle education over this time has pointed out the unsuitability of the traditional Leaving Certificate programme for a large proportion of the student cohort. It is unlikely that the target of a 90% retention rate will be met.

The *Investment in Education Report* (published in two volumes in 1965 and 1966) referred to the strong emphasis on the classical humanist subjects. It pointed out that

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whereas a very high percentage of boys studied Latin at senior cycle, very few studied a modern language. In addition very few girls studied science subjects at Leaving Certificate, particularly the Physical sciences. If one contrasts the subject uptake in 1964 with that in 1994 one can see that the percentage of girls choosing Physics and Chemistry is still small. The percentage of students (boys and girls) taking Latin has dropped dramatically but there is still a sizeable number of boys with no exposure to a modern European language.

Table 1: Percentage of Second-level students studying selected subjects at Senior Cycle / Leaving Cert. programmes (by gender), 1964 and 1994.[9]

	BOYS		GIRLS	
SUBJECT	1964	1994	1964	1994
Latin	88.3	0.5	38.5	0.2
French	21.0	52.5	64.4	69.6
German	1.9	17.4	2.7	22.0
Chemistry	31.7	15.4	4.8	13.2
Applied Maths	10.9	3.4	0.0	0.4
Physics	28.8	29.4	2.0	9.4

This Report also considered the efficient use of scarce resources in post-primary education. These scarce resources were firstly certain types of teachers (e.g. mathematics, science, rural science, modern languages, metalwork and engineering) and secondly certain kinds of relatively expensive equipment. The Report concludes:

> ..where such resources exist they are frequently not effectively utilised. ...
> As regards equipment it is frequently due to the small numbers of pupils
> who have direct access to it and to a series of conventions and regulations
> preventing or discouraging wider utilisation of these facilities. [10]

The recession of the 1970s caused youth unemployment throughout the European Community. This unemployment showed the vulnerability of two groups in particular to the shrinking demand for unskilled labour – 'the early school leaver and especially those leaving school with no formal qualifications'[11]. The decision of the European Community in 1976 to introduce educational initiatives to help those least able to compete on the jobs market provided a way of obtaining financial support for alternative programmes in Ireland.

In 1977 the Department of Education introduced pre-employment courses. These were confined initially to vocational, community and comprehensive schools and were aimed at students who might otherwise have left school early. In the first year 1,800 pupils enrolled on these courses[12]. Such courses consisted of three sections, Vocational Studies, Work Experience and General Studies. During the seven years from 1977 to 1984 changes were made in the social and educational contexts of these programmes. These changes became necessary for various reasons. Firstly, as it became obvious that youth employment was a permanent and growing problem in Europe, a more structured approach to vocational preparation was considered necessary. Secondly, vocational preparation shifted away from job-getting skills to focussing on the personal development of the student. Finally, there was a move away from emphasising job-specific skills to training in general skills. These shifts reflected the need for the job seeker to be adaptable in a time when traditional categories of jobs and skills were disappearing.

In Ireland additional factors such as the increasing failure of senior-cycle schooling to lead to employment and greater numbers of unmotivated and academically unsuccessful students staying on at school led to Pre-employment courses becoming more and more popular. The number of students taking such courses doubled between 1977 and 1983 [13]. These courses can be seen as the precursors of the Post Leaving Certificate courses (P.L.C.).

Educational concerns about the post-primary curriculum and a general sense of the need to review the system led to the establishment of the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB). One of its terms of reference as laid down by the Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey, was to make recommendations for a new unified assessment system for the junior cycle of second level schooling to replace

the Intermediate and Group certificate examinations. It was in existence from January 1984 to September 1987 during which time it issued various discussion papers, reports and newsletters in addition to the consultative document *Issues and Structures in Education* (September 1984) and a report, *In Our Schools* (March 1986). In the first of these the Board identified a consensus on the aims of education in Ireland which were

- The realisation of equality of educational opportunity;
- The transmission to each new generation of the developing spiritual and cultural heritage;
- The development of the potential of the individual;
- Education for vocational and economic competence[14]

In the second document amongst the recommendations of the Board to the Minister were:

- The Leaving Certificate programme should be adapted to cater for the increasingly diverse needs of students.
- Transition Year programmes and VPT courses should be developed...
- The Board, through its validation procedures, should promote the development of courses at senior cycle...[15]

The recognition of the need for vocational preparation together with the extension of aid from the European Social Fund to training programmes that could be incorporated in the second-level sector permitted the introduction of the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (V.P.T.P.) in 1984. On 2nd May 1984 the Department issued a circular to all second-level schools inviting them to participate in this new programme. It referred to the difficulties in finding work experienced by those leaving school 'with minimal or no qualifications'. It identified two groups of young people needing special attention:

> Firstly, there are those who drop out of school on completion of compulsory schooling and who have inadequate or no qualifications. Secondly, there are those who continue at school but whose programme of study does not contain adequate vocational preparation.[16]

It referred to Department surveys of the economic status of School Leavers one year after leaving school which supported this argument:

Those with no qualifications:	45%-50% unemployed
Junior/Inter/Group Certificates	20% – 25% unemployed
Leaving Certificate	up to 17% unemployed

The Programme for Action in Education 1984-87 had as two of its underlying principles:[17]

- The education system should, as far as possible, enable all citizens to have access to an education which is relevant to their needs and which will assist them in seeking to fulfil the potential of their abilities and talents
- Education should be continuously updated to make it relevant to the modern world, to developments in technology, to changing employment opportunities and patterns as well as to increased leisure time

However the Programme sounded a warning note that implementation of proposals would be contingent on the availability of resources

> The rate of implementation of the proposals in the programme must, therefore, be governed by the rate of progress in the economy, subject to the priority which the Government accords to education within its programme of public expenditure.[18]

In Ages for Learning (1985) the dependence on European money for vocational courses was explicitly mentioned. 'Their continuance is contingent upon the availability of ESF support'.[19]

The financial constraint of the 1970s stands in stark contrast with the abundance of funds available for educational initiatives from 1994 onwards. This change was due to the availability of ESF funding in addition to the upswing in the domestic economy.

Vocational Preparation and Training Programmes

The new one-year course the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (VPTP) started in September 1984. This was to replace the existing pre-employment courses. It was intended that this programme should reflect the realities of the labour market and the type of work available to young people. At that time there was a rapid decline in clerical employment and an increase in jobs in the service sector.

Two groups were identified as having particular difficulties with this situation: unqualified school leavers and girls seeking employment in clerical occupations. To combat this it was proposed that girls should be encouraged to broaden their vocational aspirations and that all students, particularly early school leavers, should be helped to develop

> the personal resources and flexibility to cope with the complexities of the labour market and the rapid change of work roles.[20]

To achieve this aim it was recognised that it would be necessary to reject the traditional view of vocational preparation as job-specific training. Instead the mastery of general 'core' competencies such as literacy and numeracy and broad generic skills should be the priority.

> ...employers value general competencies of literacy, numeracy and manipulative skills as much as they do skills related to specific types of jobs; - generaliseable skills together with positive attitudes towards learning, adaptibility and innovation will be the characteristics most sought after by employers and vocational preparation programmes should reflect these real marketable skill expectations in their design and curriculum.[21]

This programme was taken by 11,000 girls and 6,000 boys in 380 schools, including 118 Secondary Schools[22]. A further year of vocational training, known as VPT2 was made available in a limited number of schools to students who had completed senior cycle. VPT1 and VPT2 were not offered as a single two-year programme but as two distinct one-year programmes with the latter giving more time to technical skills and work experience. Each programme gave the student certification at the end of one year of study. This provided short term motivation for students involved (a rationale which foreshadows assessment procedures in the L.C.A.) and conforms to the principle that:

> ...if possible, new programmes should be acceptable both as a terminal programme for those making the transition from school to working life and as part of an alternative senior-cycle programme for those for whom the existing programme is not suitable.[23]

The general aim of VPTP courses was of:

bridging the gap between the values and experiences normally part of traditional education and those current in the adult world of work.[24]

One of the assumptions on which the programme was based was that the poor unemployment prospects of early school leavers were due, in part, to their lack of marketable skills and qualities. Traditional teaching methods and mainstream curricula were not considered appropriate to rectify this. Thus, the programme attempted to redress deficits in two areas – student attributes and the mainstream curriculum. VPTP1 had three elements, vocational studies, work experience and general studies with a time allocation as follows:[25]

Table 2:Time Allocation for VPTP1

Section	Description	Percentage of Time
Vocational Studies	Basic course designations (e.g. Engineering, Crafts & Design and Commercial Studies) plus others provided by school where necessary to meet local circumstances.	40%
Preparation for Working Life	School Programme; Work Experience	25%
General Studies	Communication Studies; Mathematics; Education for Living; Religion; Physical Education; Computer Familiarization	35%

In quantitative terms the VPTP programme was a success showing a need for and an interest in such a programme. An ESRI survey carried out in 1985 found that in the first year of operation the programme was offered in 91% of vocational schools, 70% of comprehensive and community schools and 23% of secondary schools (this latter figure subsequently reached 31%). This survey also concluded that Principals and participants were satisfied with the programme.[26] Qualitatively, there were differences between central aspirations and local achievement. Schools were often slow to adapt their programmes to meet local employment needs, to attract the most disadvantaged groups and to eliminate sex stereotyping from the vocational element.

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The European Community Transition Programme (I and II)

During the 1970s there was increased concern in Europe with the problem of youth unemployment and with the need to explore and develop new approaches to the preparation of young people for adult and working life. In addition, there was the desire to extend co-operation and the transfer of experience between member states in the field of education. In December 1976, the Council of the European Communities and the Ministers of Education adopted a resolution concerning measures to be taken to improve the preparation for young people in this area.[27] One of the outcomes of this resolution was the establishment of a network of twenty-nine pilot projects in the transition from school to working life (Transition I). Three of these projects were Irish, the first being the Shannon Project of Interventions for Relevant Adolescent Learning (SPIRAL) whose pilot phase lasted from 1978 until 1982. The second was the Education for Development project based in the North Mayo area which started in 1978 and the third was the Early School Leavers Project located in the CDVEC's Curriculum Development Unit which ran from 1979 to 1982. Another outcome of this resolution in Ireland was the introduction of pre-employment courses that have previously been discussed.

The Transition II Network of European Community Projects continued the theme of Preparation for Adult and Working Life. It was based on a resolution agreed by the Council of Ministers of Education of the ten member states in July 1982 that called for action to assist member states to develop their policies for young people between the ages of 14 and 18[28]. The main activities of the action programme included:

- The development and use of work experience schemes in second-level education;
- The development of equal opportunities for young women and men
- The development of new forms of assessment and certification;
- Education for enterprise;
- Schools and social action: the prevention of illiteracy, drop-out, delinquency, drug-abuse;

- The development of alternative curricula;
- Co-operation and partnership in a local regional context.

Irish participation consisted of a trio of projects, which was co-ordinated by the Department of Education who also provided fifty percent of the funding. Spiral II: The Shannon Initiatives (1983-'87) was managed by the Shannon Curriculum Development Centre which was located in St Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon, Co. Clare. The project had three main target groups.

- Young people at the post-compulsory stage who wished to remain on at school and did not wish to do the Leaving Certificate. The programmes developed to meet their needs are called Senior Certificate.
- School going young women at junior and senior cycle.
- Junior cycle students who had been experiencing difficulties in learning Irish.[29]

The project developed seven Senior Certificate programmes aimed at providing another route to national certification for those not wishing to follow existing programmes. These programmes were as follows:

- Work and Communication Skills
- Computer Applications
- Food and Agriculture
- Gaeilge Chumarsaideach
- General Technology
- Mathematics
- Social and Cultural Studies
- Religious Education

The programmes were implemented in schools mainly in the province of Munster either as the constituents of a totally alternative senior cycle curriculum, as individual Senior Certificate programmes within the Transition Year Option or Leaving Certificate or as individual Senior Certificate programmes within the V.P.T.P. A total of 3,397 students took some of these programmes between September 1984 and January 1988. 60% of the 1986-88 cohort and 56% of the 1985-87 cohort completed two years of the programmes. The participation rates of secondary school were high also – 68% at the pilot stage and 58% at the dissemination stage. The reason

advanced for this was the high level of interest shown by girls and co-ed. schools.[30] The participation rates of boys secondary schools were low.

Table 3: Senior Certificate – Participating Schools

Participating Schools by type[31]							
	Secondary				Community / Comprehensive	Vocational	Total
	Girls	Boys	Mixed	Total			
Cohort 1 (1984-86)	12	1	2	15	5	2	22
Cohort 2 (1985-87)	9	0	0	9	4	1	14
Cohort 3 (1986-88)	20	3	10	33	10	14	57
Cohort 4 (1987-89)	20	3	10	33	10	13	56

The Senior Certificate was assessed and certified by means of a national examination organised by the Department of Education at the end of each year. In addition the school presented each student with a record of Personal Experience and Achievement on leaving school.

The other Irish curricular initiatives involved in this action programme were the Dublin Inner City Education Project and the Project for the Integrated Provision of Education (PIPE). The former was developed by the Curriculum Development Unit, which is managed jointly by the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC), Trinity College, Dublin and the Department of Education. The project was planned in 1982-3 and was funded from 1983 to 1987. Its aim was the social and vocational preparation of young people with poor prospects of employment, in order to enable them to acquire a degree of independence in a changing society.[32] Its target groups were:

- Young people completing their schooling with poor employment prospects
- Unemployed young people who have just left school
- Girls and young women with poor unemployment prospects

The Project for the Integrated Provision of Education (PIPE) was based in the Curriculum Development Centre in the City of Galway Vocational Education Committee. The schools involved were all second level schools in Galway City and south Co. Mayo. Eighteen of these twenty-seven schools participated. It was funded from 1983 to 1987. The aims of the project were:

- To examine the attitudes toward education held by teachers, students and parents.
- To introduce into schools curricular interventions designed to help those leaving school to confront the choices and challenges to be encountered in the outside world.
- To offer support to teachers in planning programmes by providing in-service training and resource materials.
- To further develop links between schools, communities and employers through out of school activities supported by youth groups and other agencies.
- To involve parents fully in the planning and implementation of programmes
- To examine the effect of gender on subject and career choice.[33]

The Project developed five school courses over this time. The first four of these were one-year courses aimed at senior cycle students while the fifth was a three-year programme at junior cycle. The courses were:

- Enterprise Development
- Community Action
- Working World
- Beyond School
- Technology

The Junior Cycle

The CEB was disbanded in September 1987 and replaced two months later by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). It was set up as an Advisory Body, although the Education Act (1999) proposes to establish it on a statutory basis. At its establishment its role was:

- to advise the Minister on the Curriculum at first and second levels
- to advise the Minister on appropriate modes and techniques of assessment
- to co-ordinate research and development
- to report on standards of student performance, including performance in the public examinations.

Its priority was to draw up plans for the implementation of a new unified system of assessment and certification at Junior Cycle, to be called the Junior Certificate. By September 1988 the first drafts of a new syllabus in seven subjects were ready and were circulated to schools. The Minister announced that the new Junior Certificate would be examined for the first time in 1992. This meant that the students entering secondary schools in September 1989 would be the first group studying the new programme.

The aims of the Junior Certificate Programme were to

- reinforce and further develop in the young person the knowledge, understanding, attitudes, skills and competencies acquired at primary level
- extend and deepen the range and quality of the young person's educational experience in terms of knowledge, understanding, attitudes, skills and competencies
- develop the young person's personal and social confidence, initiative and competence through a broad, well-balanced, general education
- prepare the young person for the requirements of further programmes of study, of employment or of life outside full-time education
- contribute to the moral and spiritual development of the young person and develop a tolerance and respect for the values and beliefs of others
- prepare the young person for the responsibilities of citizenship in the national context and in the context of the wider European and global communities[34]

It was intended that these aims would be achieved by adhering to the curriculum principles of breadth and balance, relevance, quality, continuity and progression and finally coherence.

The features of the new programme should be cross-curricular consistency, equity of treatment, differentiation to allow for differences in abilities and aptitudes, flexibility, provision for disadvantaged pupils and finally a European dimension. It was also recommended that each school should give pupils experience in the following areas:

- Language and Literature
- Mathematical Studies
- Science and Technology

- Physical Education
- Social, Political & Environmental Ed.
- Arts Education
- Guidance, Counselling & Pastoral Care
- Religious Education

With regard to assessment and certification of the programme the N.C.C.A. recommended that the examinations should 'be congruent with and reflect the aims and objectives of syllabuses'.[35] In addition, the existing range of provisions for examining (written, practical, project, oral, aural) which included school-based, external and terminal assessments, should be maintained and, where feasible and desirable, extended. In practice this did not happen to the detriment of the programme:

> The NCCA recognises that the introduction of a wider range of assessment modes and techniques is essential to the full implementation of the Junior Certificate programme. The absence of such arrangements has had a negative impact on the implementation of the programme to date...This is particularly true of the teaching methodologies and the school and classroom organisation which are essential to the full realisation of the aims, objectives and spirit of the Junior Certificate programme.[36]

The Report on the National Education Convention (1994) expressed support for the main thrust of the Junior Certificate programme. It did refer to difficulties in implementation:

> These related to the adequacy of resourcing, particularly for practical subject areas and in small schools, more inservice for teachers, the need for time for curriculum planning, the scarcity of textbooks in the Irish language, and the requirements of students with special needs.[37]

The Report also raised the issue of curriculum levels and student differentiation. It was possible that the introduction of Foundation courses was having the negative effect of students following courses at a lower level than they were capable of. There was a possible difficulty with access to courses in senior cycle when students got locked in at an early stage to particular course levels. The Report reiterated the drawbacks of the existing form of assessment.

> It is the view of the Secretariat that the present system of assessment at Junior Cycle is inadequate and unless reforms are introduced the objectives of the Junior Certificate programme will not be achieved.[38]

The inadequacy of the present forms of assessment is noted in the Progress Report of the Junior Cycle Review Committee (NCCA, May 1999).

> ...the vast majority of students is assessed and certificated by means of terminal written examination only and by two aural tests – in Irish and Modern Languages – held in conjunction with the written paper. This restricted range of modes and techniques has a number of serious implications for the Junior Certificate programme.[39]

Firstly there is an ongoing mismatch between the aims and principles of the programme and the modes and techniques currently in use for its formal assessment.

Secondly these assessment procedures have an impact on teaching and learning.

> If assessment is concentrated on the verbal and logico-mathematical, and students engage in that assessment solely through paper and pencil tests, then it is likely that the teaching and learning styles will reflect the same bias.
>
> Such a bias in teaching and learning is at odds with the principles of breadth and balance which underpin the curriculum at junior cycle and with the active learning methodologies envisaged in the development of the Junior Certificate programme.[40]

Furthermore the overemphasis on the verbal and logico-mathematical in assessment, teaching and learning has implications for the students' experiences of, and engagement with, the curriculum. As the curriculum becomes concentrated into examinable forms the principle of quality may suffer and the commitment to relevance is interpreted as what is relevant to the examination rather than what is relevant to the student. The current assessment arrangements create a 'hierarchy of outcomes'[41] in which the formally assessed outcomes may be seen as being of greater value than those which are not.

> Students whose strengths lie in areas outside the verbal and logico-mathematical may experience the curriculum as irrelevant and 'boring'. For these students, the experience of failure is inevitable if assessment deals chiefly with those outcomes associated with the verbal and logico-mathematical and gives no formal recognition to other skills.[42]

Finally the current situation has operational as well educational difficulties. There are particular difficulties associated with the operation, scheduling, servicing and staffing of multi-component examinations in a context of external assessment. In 1998 the public examinations required the withdrawal of some 2,300 teachers from their school for oral, practical and project work. This withdrawal created logistical problems in the schools.

> The consultation process highlighted the concern of managers and teachers alike that any development of assessment at junior cycle must take cognisance of the need to avoid further disruption in schools and to protect the school year from further erosion. The integrity of time in school for the full curriculum is threatened by the assessment of those subjects in the Junior Certificate Examinations (and Leaving Certificate Examinations) which currently feature forms of assessment other than terminal written examination papers.[43]

These issues have significance for the development of the Leaving Certificate where there is now a move towards activity-based learning and broader forms of assessment. The White Paper refers to the need for such development:

> While external examinations will continue to be the main instrument for assessing achievement at the senior cycle, a wider range of assessment techniques will be necessary. The techniques will evaluate the range of skills that are now demanded in a modern society, including thinking and innovation skills, practical skills and research and problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to apply knowledge.[44]

It would seem that introducing such techniques would be difficult if not impossible given the experience thus far of assessment at Junior Certificate level.

> ...the development of assessment in the Leaving Certificate examination ... is severely restricted by the demands made on the system by the current nature and format of the Junior Certificate examination. The current system cannot be expected to respond as it should to the need to develop both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations if both examinations retain their current format.[45]

Senior Cycle

The NCCA published a consultative document on senior cycle policy in 1990 and presented a position paper to the Minister in June 1991. The consultative document considered the preferred model at Senior Cycle to be an inclusive model 'one that

will accommodate the greatest number of students with flexibility to cater for a diversity of student needs.'[46]

The Board recommended the introduction of a Certificate of Senior Cycle Education that would be awarded to all students on satisfactory completion of a senior cycle programme.

The Curriculum Awareness Action Group in its survey of 151 Secondary school principals (1990) found that, on average, the principals considered the Leaving Certificate programme unsuitable for about one in four (24.4%) of their students and that about one in six (16.7%) students were poorly motivated.[47] Other groups such as the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) point out that the students for whom the programme is unsuitable and who do badly in the examination are generally from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

> As such the Leaving Certificate Programme and the allied examination system contribute significantly to the inequality of educational outcomes...[48]

The OECD *Review of National Education Policy (1991)* drew attention to the weight of the classical humanist tradition in Irish Education which:

> is enormous, not least because of its underpinning of high-status occupations and a way of life which is widely admired even though unattainable by the majority. This dominance is likely to prevail unless the authorities are able to develop either a much more powerful parallel system of technical/vocational schools or a restructured general secondary education curriculum.[49]

The call for a review was repeated in the NCCA's Review of Leaving Certificate Examination results 1994 and the Report of the Industrial Policy Review Group (1992).

In its chapter on education, enterprise and technology this Report (also known as the Culliton report after its Chairman) pointed out that the education system was

becoming more academic. It noted that vocational education was being crowded out by the academic stream and that this trend was evident in both secondary and vocational schools. It concluded that the prestige of the Leaving Certificate programme had diverted students who would be much better adapted to a technical training. It recommended redressing this imbalance by improving the incentives and the facilities for second level students opting for technical and vocational courses. It cited Germany and Switzerland as examples of countries that have successfully implemented such programmes. It also proposed closer links between schools and industry.

> The most successful training and education systems, in terms of enhancing competitiveness, are those where companies play an active role in the development of programmes and curricula, with particular attention to practical needs, and which combine on-the-job training with a strong back-up from vocational and technical schools.[50]

It recommended a parallel stream of non-academic vocationally oriented education at second level that would command widespread recognition, respect and support.

The NCCA did not agree with this dual-track approach at senior cycle fearing that it would create 'a false dichotomy' between academic and vocational education[51] while it accepted that change was desirable and necessary.

> The NCCA believes that a general education is essential at senior cycle, that this is compatible with a certain degree of specialisation in range of study and that such an education should incorporate both so-called academic and vocational components.[52]

The Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World* (June 1992) described the NCCA proposals for senior cycle structure as a basis for development. These were:

- Students would take courses from within two national programmes – the Leaving Certificate and the Senior Certificate.
- The Leaving Certificate would continue to be a 2-year programme.
- The Senior Certificate programme would also continue to be a 2-year programme, constructed in two modules of one year each and with certification available at the end of each year. It would incorporate the VPT1 programme, as currently operated.

- Students would be allowed to choose courses from both the Leaving Certificate and Senior Certificate in any one year.
- A number of options would be available to students progressing through the senior cycle.

It indicated a preference for providing for all options and ability levels within the Leaving Certificate rather than having two separate certificates at this level. The reason for this was

> ... the strong traditional attachment of parents and students to the Leaving Certificate,...to alleviate the practical problems that are likely to emerge in seeking to implement a range of options within two alternative streams.[53]

It also addressed the need for improved vocational and technical education at second level that had been pointed out by the *Report of the Industrial Policy Review Group* (1992). Although Culliton had cited Germany as an example the Green Paper referred to the example of Sweden and Japan, where vocational training starts after the age of 18. It did not accept the proposal for a separate vocational stream as proposed by Culliton reasoning that:

> ...a separate non-academic vocational stream would be regarded as providing only for less able children, and would not meet the objective of ensuring a broadly based education for all, with vocational options and orientation, up to the completion of the second-level stage.[54]

It proposed to build on and expand the range of vocational options within the existing Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme with the intention of expanding the numbers participating from 5% to at least 30% of the cohort from 1994. It also agreed that the active involvement of industry should be sought in school programmes generally.

> The aim will be to create an environment in the school in which students will develop a more informed awareness of the world of work and in which a spirit of enterprise and initiative will be fostered.[55]

The NCCA policy document *Towards the New Century* (1993) stated that its policy was founded on four essential premises:

- The Senior Cycle curriculum should be viewed as a single entity and designed to cater for up to 90% of the age range, 15 to 18 years.

- Priority must be given to the provision of quality-experience, in a variety of forms, to all, including both high-achieving students and those students for whom the current leaving certificate programme is unsuited.
- One major programme should be provided at senior cycle for national certification – the Leaving Certificate programme;
- Appropriate forms of student assessment must be developed to complement the curricular approaches set out in senior cycle programmes.

Circulars M31/93 and M47/93 issued by the Minister for Education indicated that the restructuring of the senior cycle would follow these guidelines. Circular M31/93 indicated that the Leaving Certificate programme would have three components, higher, ordinary and applied. The Leaving Certificate Applied would be a distinct self-contained programme that would replace and expand on the existing Senior Certificate and Vocational Preparation and Training Programmes (VPT1). At this time it was thought that many of the 23% of students who were taking ordinary level Leaving Certificate with minimal achievement would opt for this programme in addition to the cohort involved in Senior Certificate and VPT1 courses.

The White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (1995) confirms the restructuring of the senior cycle of which the four main elements are:

- The availability of the Transition Year Programme as an option for all second-level schools
- The revision of the established Leaving Certificate programme
- The introduction of a new Leaving Certificate Applied course
- The development and expansion of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

This development would take a number of considerations into account, one of which would be to increase the emphasis on the vocational orientation of all subjects.

Conclusion

The success of this suite of programmes at Leaving Certificate level depends on addressing various issues. As has been seen from the review of the Junior Certificate broadening the forms of assessment has created major difficulties. Given the constraints of time and the reluctance of teachers to become involved in school-based

assessment it is unlikely that assessment procedures at Leaving Certificate level will alter significantly in the present situation.

Certification is another extremely important issue. All groups recognise the status enjoyed by the Leaving Certificate with students, parents and employers. One of the difficulties encountered by previous innovations such as the Senior Certificate and VPT programmes was the lack of similar recognition. This is also an issue with the Leaving Certificate Applied to which the points system does not apply. Similarly the Link Modules in the LCVP attract a lesser rating for points than the academic subjects. Since points, despite criticism, are the yardstick by which achievement in the Leaving Certificate is measured, a programme that is not eligible for points creates suspicion amongst certain students, parents and employers. The implication is that different is less valuable. If there is a serious effort to have breadth and balance in the curriculum by acknowledging other forms of knowledge and modes of learning this question of status needs to be addressed and ways of overcoming this prejudice need to be found.

The Government has introduced a number of programmes aimed at increasing the participation and prolonging the involvement at second-level of certain sectors. Despite such initiatives however, it does not seem likely that these targets will be met.

The EU has had and will continue to have a great influence on Irish Education. Articles 126 and 127 of the Maastricht Treaty focus on education and training. Article 126 states:

> The community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between member states and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action…

The European Commission produced a White Paper on Education, *Teaching and Learning, Towards a Learning Society* in 1996. This sets out five objectives:

- to encourage the acquisition of new knowledge;
- to bring schools and businesses closer together;
- to combat exclusion;
- to develop proficiency in three European languages;
- to treat capital investment and investment in training on an equal basis.

It proposes a 'Learning Society' where education and training will be the primary means for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment. Ones relative position in society (ones 'learning relationship') will be determined by ones knowledge and skills and this relationship will become increasingly dominant.[56] The White Paper highlights the importance of school in this process:

> Naturally, everything starts at school, which is where the learning society has its roots. ...School has to adapt, but nevertheless remains the irreplaceable instrument of everyone's personal development and social integration. Much is asked of it because it has so much to offer.[57]

Ireland and Portugal are the two member states spending large amounts of structural funds on Education. Between 1994 and 1999 Irish education will have received a total of £IR815 million from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Almost 56% of ESF aid and 80% of ERDF aid is allocated to education. Many of the new initiatives and pilot programmes owe their existence to a mixture of EU money and Exchequer funding, totalling £IR1.476 billion. This includes programmes such as Early Start, Youthreach, LCA and LCVP at second level and apprenticeship training, tourism training, technical skills programmes and graduate training and enterprise programmes at third level. In addition much of the in-career development at all levels is similarly funded. It is estimated that a total of £IR48 million, including EU aid to the tune of £IR36 million will have been spent on in-career development between 1994 and 1999.[58]

The question of what will happen after 1999 must now be considered. With the current economic boom and after recent discussions in Brussels it is accepted that Ireland will receive greatly reduced funding. Will this mean that many of these initiatives will be scaled down or halted? If so, will there be a detrimental effect on the support for and dissemination of these new programmes?

The term 'Partners in Education' includes parents and employers. The involvement of such groups will enhance possibilities and create further challenges. This partnership of management, teachers and parents is very significant and is formally recognised in the various Government Policy Documents of the nineties:

> The learner is at the centre of the educational process. The other principal participants are collectively referred to as the partners in education – parents, patrons/trustees/owners/governors, management bodies, teachers, the local community and the State. Effective partnership involves active co-operation among those directly involved in the provision of education…also requires increased transparency and accountability, in order to allow the partners to exercise their rights and to be accountable for their responsibilities.[59]

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences challenges the view that intelligence is something innate of which one has a fixed amount and that tests exist to measure this amount. Gardner suggests that rather than one or two intelligences, all human beings have several intelligences. People do not have the same strength in each intelligence area. Just as people have different personalities and different appearances they also have different kinds of minds. He defines eight types of intelligence - linguistic, logico-mathematical, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily kinesthetic and naturalist. Schools have traditionally concentrated on only two of these, namely linguistic and logico-mathematical. Acceptance of the validity of multiple intelligences and the introduction of programmes which acknowledge different forms of knowledge and modes of learning pose new challenges for those involved in education.

CHAPTER TWO

Current suite of programmes at senior cycle

The three-year senior cycle was introduced as an option for all second-level schools

in September 1994.

> Students may now spend up to three years in senior cycle. They may
> follow a two-year Leaving Certificate programme immediately after Junior
> Certificate, or they may opt to follow a Transition year programme before
> a two-year Leaving Certificate.[60]

The suite of programmes available is:

- Transition Year Programme;
- Established Leaving Certificate;
- Leaving Certificate Applied
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

This set of programmes is designed to provide:

- continuity and progression from Junior Certificate;
- an effective general education with an expanded vocational orientation
- equality of access for all;
- diversity of provision to meet differing aptitudes, needs, abilities and
  career options;
- the highest standards of student performance commensurate with levels
  of ability;
- assessment procedures consistent with the aims and objectives of the
  syllabi[61]

It is also an attempt to expand and diversify the existing senior cycle sufficiently to

cater for all student needs.

> The NCCA acknowledges the social status attached to the Leaving
> Certificate and has always been attracted by the possibility of building
> from within that programme rather than constructing an "alternative"
> programme.[62]

Transition Year Option (TYO)

Transition Year is an optional one year course taken by students at the end of junior

cycle before entering a Leaving Certificate programme. It was first introduced in

1974 when three schools with a total of 66 students offered it on a pilot basis. By the

1976/77 school year there were sixteen schools providing TYO to 434 pupils.

Although other schools expressed interest in the programme there was no further expansion of the programme until after the publication of the consultative document *Ages for Learning* (1984). The Government response to this document indicated that development of TYO was planned:

- That post-primary courses will be developed so as to enable pupils to spend up to six years overall in a post-primary school.
- That subject to the approval of the Minister, and taking account of the need to rationalise course provision in the various school centres, schools will be permitted to develop additional courses from among the following:
- Transition Year immediately following the junior cycle. This course will allow for the development of broad general education, including academic study and elements of career education.[63]

The earliest date for schools to be permitted to provide a TYO was 1986/87 at which point there was a significant increase in participation with seventy-three schools and 2,918 students involved. At this time schools devised their own programmes based on guidelines produced by the CEB and submitted them to the Department of Education for approval. During this time approval was on a limited basis. Schools that had been offering four-year junior cycles were permitted to offer TYO in 1989. By 1993 there were 163 schools with 8499 students involved in the programme. The Department issued a new set of guidelines and offered a programme of in-career development for teachers. A school had to participate in the programme to get approval. In addition, a grant of £50 per student was introduced to cover the additional costs to the schools for implementing the programme. This grant has been maintained for each subsequent academic year. From autumn 1995 to June 1998 the Department seconded fourteen teachers on a full time basis to form a Transition Year Support team. This team assisted and supported schools in the introduction, implementation and development of their programmes by working with Principals, co-ordinators and teachers in the schools, organising workshops and by preparing resource materials. This team was reduced to four members for the academic year 1998/99. By 1998 there were 510 schools and 25,000 students participating.

The aims of TYO are to:

- Promote maturity with emphasis on social awareness and increased social competence;
- Provide experience of adult and working life as a basis for personal development and maturity;
- Promote general, technical and academic skills with an emphasis on inter-disciplinary and self-directed learning.

The Transition Year Programme gives each school the opportunity to design a programme to meet the needs of its students. This necessitates the teachers in the school becoming involved in curriculum design as well as curriculum delivery. Since there were 24,300 students involved in Transition Year Programmes in 1996/97[64] and this number continues to increase it is clear that a large number of teachers are involved. The Report on the National Education Convention noted the enthusiasm for TYO. It was felt that students matured during the year and sometimes revised their subject and career choices. Particular benefits, by way of improved self-esteem, accrued to lower-achieving students. However the report did have advice to ensure good practice:

> ...provision during the transition year would be likely to improve if schools had to submit a programme annually, if schools were inspected, if information on good practice was more widely disseminated, if additional resources were provided and if more time was allocated to the co-ordinator's work.[65]

The Leaving Certificate.

The Leaving Certificate now consists of three elements. It is envisaged that the majority of students will continue to choose the established Leaving Certificate programme as it is acknowledged that students, parents and employers all hold it in high esteem.[66]

Revision of syllabi in Leaving Certificate subjects is ongoing. Revised syllabi in the four modern European Languages, Gaeilge and Accounting were introduced in September 1995. The new syllabus in English will be introduced in September 1999.

The NCCA has been requested to increase the vocational orientation of each subject in addition to updating the content and relevance of syllabi.

> All Leaving Certificate courses at all levels, in respecting the principles of breadth and balance, should incorporate a well-defined vocational component.[67]

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

This programme is modular rather than subject-based. It focuses on the talents of individual students and emphasises developing their sense of responsibility and self-esteem. It is geared at those students who formerly would have taken Senior Certificate or VPTP1 courses and also many of the 23% who take ordinary level in all subjects in the Leaving Certificate. The number of students completing the LCA increased from 750 in its first year to 1,700 in 1998 and more than 2,500 students are expected to sit the terminal exams of the LCA in 1999[68].

The unique features of the LCA are the courses involved, the range of student experience and learning, the way in which the programme is organised and the way in which students are assessed. The programme is structured around three main areas:

- Vocational preparation which focuses on preparation for work, work experience, enterprise, community work and English & Communication;
- General Education which gives students general life skills including the arts, social education, leisure and languages;
- Vocational Education which is concerned with the development of mathematical and information technology skills and the practical skills necessary for specialist areas such as tourism, business, horticulture, engineering and technology.[69]

The organisation of the programme is unique. The two years are divided into half-year blocks called sessions. All courses are designed on a modular basis with each module lasting one session. During the two years students take a total of forty modules. Assessment is based on a system of credits that are awarded over the

course of the two years. A total of 100 credits may be accumulated over the 4 sessions and student achievement and performance are recorded in three ways:

- Satisfactory completion of modules   40 credits
- Performance of 9 student tasks   27 credits
- Performance in Final Examinations   33 credits

Satisfactory completion of a module requires attending the classes and out-of-school activities pertaining to that module. No ranking or assessment is involved. The student tasks are identified, designed and planned at school level and subsequently assessed by external examiners appointed by the Department of Education and Science. The final examinations are conducted as part of the existing time-table of the Leaving Certificate examinations. LCA students have exams in the following areas:

- English and Communications
- Social Education
- Mathematical Applications
- Vocational Specialisms
- Languages.

At the end of the two years students who successfully complete the programme receive the Leaving Certificate Applied Certificate. This is a single award based on three levels: Pass (60 credits), Merit (70 credits) and Distinction (85 credits). A Record of Experience is available to those who do not reach the 60 credits with the opportunity to pick up outstanding credits at a later stage.

While the LCA addresses some of the criticisms voiced about the programmes that it replaced concern has been expressed about its validity due to its limited recognition for purposes of progression. LCA students can only proceed to Third-Level via a Post Leaving Certificate course unlike those students following the established programme. The danger is that this may undermine the value of the programme and prevent it from being considered a "real" Leaving Certificate.

The introduction of the L.C.A.P. will do much to counter criticisms made of Vocational Preparation and Training Programmes which it will replace. For one thing, students will in the future be awarded certification. However, since the course will not lead to formal vocational qualifications and the course's certificands may only progress to limited courses of post-secondary education, there is a distinct danger that it will be seen as a "soft-option" track and of limited value by students unless it is carefully planned and designed to respond to student needs. Continual review of the operation of the programme will be essential if this situation is to be avoided.[70]
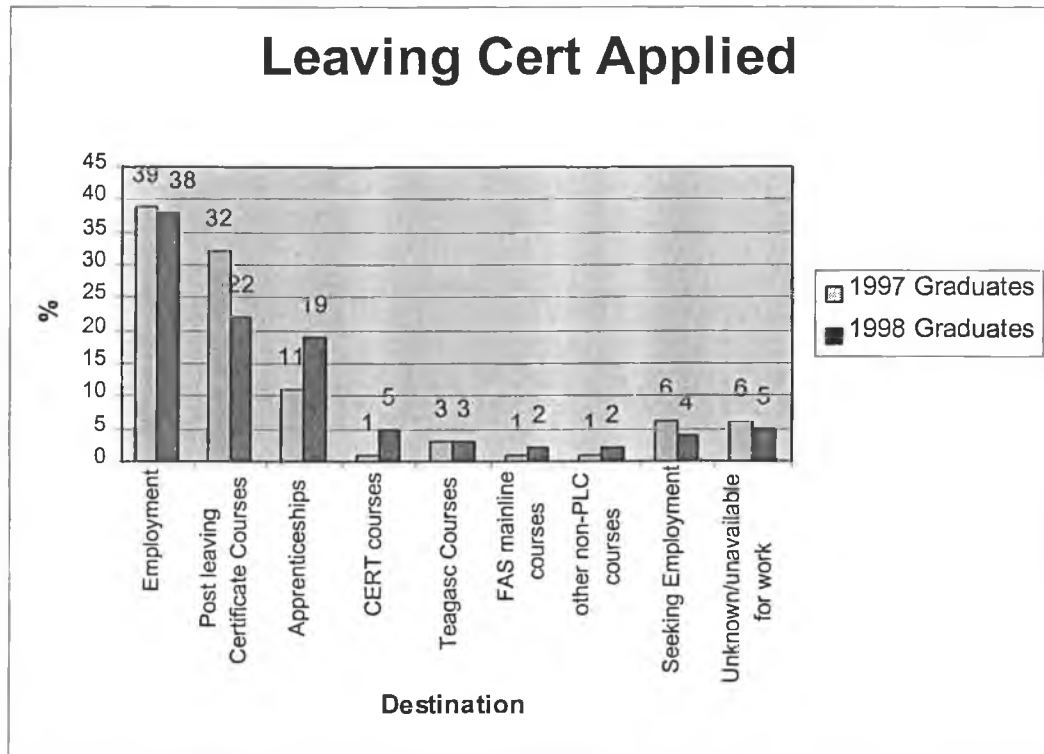
Figure 1:Destination of LCA Graduates 1997, 1998

However a preliminary study carried out by the NCCA of the first group of students to complete the LCA in 1997 gave some heartening results. It found that out of 941 graduates of sixty-three schools 38% went directly into employment, 22% into PLC courses, 19% began apprenticeships, 12% are involved in other courses including CERT and Teagasc while 4% were seeking work.[71] (cf Figure One). The uptake of the programme continues to increase with 1,700 students graduating in 1998 and with around 2,500 students enrolled in 1999.[72]

The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

The LCVP was first introduced into second level schools in 1989 with a view to increasing the vocational relevance of the Leaving Certificate programme. Students taking the programme were required to follow the Leaving Certificate programme in at least five subjects, to include:

- Irish;
- Two subjects from Construction Studies, Engineering, and technical Drawing;
- a modern continental language (the terms of Circular M/41/89 applied);
- at least one other subject from the approved list;

As part of the programme Work Experience of a minimum of four week's duration was to be undertaken and in the delivery of the programme new technologies were to be emphasised. Students who successfully completed this programme received, in addition to the Leaving Certificate, a participation certificate.[73]

This original programme was deemed to be restrictive since the conditions of participation meant that, in practice, access to the programme was confined to boys in Vocational Schools.It was, therefore, restructured and expanded. This modified programme was introduced in sixty-eight schools in September 1994. In the academic year 1996/97 there were 10,132 students enrolled on Year One of the programme and 6,379 students on Year Two. A total of 10,923 students out of a total of 64,761 Leaving Certificate students are expected to sit the examinations in the Link Modules in 1999[74]. It is envisaged that this programme will eventually be taken by up to 30% of all senior cycle students. The restructured programme was designed to enhance the overall vocational orientation of the Leaving Certificate programme. It differs from the original LCVP in that it provided an expanded range of curricular options thus enhancing the opportunities for boys and girls to participate in a vocationally oriented curriculum.

Students following the programme must take:

- Two Leaving Certificate subjects from one of the subject groupings in the Specialist Mode or the services Mode. The Specialist Mode involves the grouping of subjects which have a complementary relationship e.g. Building Construction and technical drawing. The Services Mode involves subjects which complement one another in a commercial context e.g. Home Economics and Biology
- A Leaving Certificate continental language or an *ab initio* programme or a vocational language module available from NCVA
- Irish
- At least one other Leaving Certificate subject;
- Three link modules on Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work and Work Experience

The Link Modules

The Link Modules are intended to support students to become more enterprising by offering them opportunities to initiate ideas, develop them, put them into practice and evaluate the results. They are activity driven and facilitate project work, mini-enterprises, visits to business and industry and the development of personal and communication skills. The modules are designed to be delivered as an integrated whole. Each one is divided into units with specific learning objectives.

Link Module 1, **Preparation for Work**, aims to help the student to:

- Acquire factual knowledge about the world of work generally
- Become better informed about career opportunities and related decisions
- See, more clearly, connections between other modules and the world of work
- Appreciate the value of enterprise in creating a developing community
- Develop job search skills and improve interview techniques
- Increase awareness of the impact of specific enterprises on the local/national economy
- Interact with the world of work in order to acquire the practical knowledge and skills necessary to develop an enterprise[75]

This module has five units:

- Unit 1   Introduction to the World of Work
- Unit 2   Local Enterprise
- Unit 3   Interview Techniques/Job Search Skills
- Unit 4   Voluntary Community Work/Work Shadowing
- Unit 5   Interacting with Business

Link Module 2, **Work Experience**, aims to enable the student to:

- Experience working in an adult environment
- Develop self confidence from assuming the responsibilities of work
- Gain particular insights into specific workplaces
- Consider future career decisions in the light of their own aspirations or present choices
- Have an opportunity of establishing contact with potential future employers
- Acquire and apply skills and knowledge by direct experience in a particular workplace
- Appreciate more clearly the relevance of the other link modules to the world of work
- Develop capabilities to cope with and solve problems in an unfamiliar environment[76]

The units involved are:

- Unit 1   Preplacement Planning Unit
- Unit 2   Insights into Specific Workplaces
- Unit 3   Occupational Skills
- Unit 4   Debriefing

The third Link Module, **Enterprise Education**, aims to enable the student to:

- Develop attitudes, skills and abilities which are appropriate, transferable and useful in their future roles as producers, consumers, citizens, leaders, decision makers and parents
- Set up and run their own projects as a vehicle for learning
- Foster personal development so that young people are better equipped to adapt to and take advantage of changing circumstances in business, society, employment and career
- Develop competence in numeracy, communication, decision making and social skills through their application to realistic situations
- Provide pupils with a more realistic understanding of how and why enterprises operate
- Provide pupils with a greater awareness and appreciation of enterprise in action at home, school, work, leisure and the role of small local business enterpreneurship and self-employment in business and society
- Experience working as part of a team[77]

The units associate with this module are:

- Unit 1   Introduction to Enterprise
- Unit 2   Enterprise Skills/Communication Skills
- Unit 3   Enterprise in Operation 1
- Unit 4   Enterprise in Operation 2
- Unit 5   Personal Review

Assessment and Certification

Assessment and verification was established and implemented by the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) and the Department of Education and Science. The Leaving Certificate subjects chosen by LCVP students are examined in

the usual way in the Leaving Certificate examination. The Link Modules are assessed as a single unit that consists of two elements, a portfolio of coursework and a written examination. The portfolio of coursework is assessed in May of the final year of the Leaving Certificate and accounts for 60% of the total marks. It consists of two sections:

- Section One: Core Items – Curriculum Vitae, Formal Letter, Completed Form and Summary Report;
- Section Two: Optional Items – two from Record Book/Diary, Long Report, Plan, Recorded Interview/Presentation

Students can score a pass (50 – 64%), merit (65 – 79%) or a distinction (80 –100%) on the Link Modules.

All students receive the Leaving Certificate on successful completion of the programme. The Certificate will consist of a statement of the grades achieved in the subjects taken and a statement of performance in the Link Modules. The performance on the Link Modules has now been awarded a points rating for entry to Third Level institutions.

Table 4: Points Rating for LCVP Link Modules

	Distinction (80-100%)	Merit (65-79%)	Pass (50-64%)
Institutes of Technology (other than D.I.T.)	70	50	30
Universities & D.I.T.	50	40	30

The Department has set up support for these new programmes. The *Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service* is being provided jointly by the Curriculum Development Centre, Shannon and the City of Dublin VEC Curriculum Development Centre. The LCVP Support Team is based in the Marino Institute of Education. These support teams are available to help schools and teachers with implementing, evaluating and assessing their programme.

Conclusion

These programmes have implications for schools considering their implementation. The Transition Year with its emphasis on school-based curriculum design provides great opportunity for teachers and a well-organised programme can be very advantageous for students. Conversely, a poorly thought out and badly delivered programme can have detrimental consequences, reinforcing the perception prevalent among parents and students that Transition Year is a 'doss' year and hardening resistance to innovation among teachers.

Both LCA and LCVP require consideration and reflection in schools prior to introduction. In both cases a target group of students needs to be identified and considered viable in terms of staffing and resources. In the case of LCA it is possible that the school ethos may be hostile to the introduction of an alternative programme, particularly in schools with a traditional academic curriculum. In this case it would be difficult to get staff interested in delivering the programme and students willing to take it. With the LCVP the school may have to contend with prejudice among parents, students and teachers that a Leaving Certificate with a vocational element is in some way less valuable. Finally practical issues such as timetabling, personnel and resources for the programme must be taken into account. The ease with which a new programme can be introduced is a factor in its implementation. One that can be introduced with minimum disruption to the status quo has a greater chance of the stakeholders agreeing to its initiation and implementation. Paradoxically, this initial ease may militate against a wider dissemination of the initiation. It remains the province of the initial enthusiasts while the majority stay largely unchanged and uninfluenced.

These issues and others will be illustrated in the case study of the introduction and implementation of the LCVP into a particular secondary school, Saint Anne's. The following chapter gives a profile of the school so that the backdrop against which the programme was discussed will be clearly understood.

Chapter Three

School Profile

Background

Saint Anne's is a large voluntary secondary school for girls situated in a northside Dublin suburb. The school is under the trusteeship of a religious order. The order has been working in the parish since 1952 when it was invited by the parish priest to open a convent and primary school. Although the primary work of this order is nursing and it has responsibility for hospitals and nursing homes both in Ireland and in England it is involved with several primary schools in the Dublin area and with two other secondary schools in Ireland. The first, a community college in a country town, has now reverted to the control of the V.E.C. while it continues its involvement with the second, a small boarding school in a rural area.

Saint Anne's secondary school opened in 1957. Originally the school was a private fee-paying establishment but it joined the free education scheme in 1967. A Board of Management was set up in 1990 and the first Lay Principal was appointed in June 1995.

Although the school started with a small number of students the demand for places steadily increased requiring a first extension in 1964 and a second one in 1977. Throughout the eighties and early part of the nineties demand for places outstripped supply but the last few years have seen student numbers start to fall. In the Academic Year 1996/97 the student enrolment was 967. The October returns for 1998 give a student number of 897. This drop in numbers has consequences for staff in that some will face redeployment and others who have been working on temporary or E.P.T. contracts see their hopes of a permanent position diminish. This

uncertainty has a more general consequence for staff morale. The school will have ten teachers job-sharing, three on career break and two on study leave for the Academic Year 1999/2000.

The school has traditionally had a very strong work ethic and an excellent academic record. Students, in general, are motivated to learn and their parents are extremely anxious that they perform well in the State examinations. The school statement of Religious and Educational Philosophy[78] says:

> This school environment, worthy of human beings, produces a concern for
> the welfare and good of others. This concern reflects itself officially in a
> strict discipline, exact time-keeping and regular organised study.

These two aspects, discipline and work, were the points mentioned by parents in the past when explaining their choice of this school for their daughters. There is a strong Examination Culture in the school. It prides itself on good results in the public exams and this is a strong expectation from both students and parents. The teachers acknowledge this reality which makes it more difficult for non-academic programmes to flourish.

In recent years teachers have noticed a change in the areas of discipline and work. Students, in general, are more boisterous than before and the number of disruptive students is increasing. There is also concern that the extremely academic curriculum offered by the school does not meet the needs of an increasing number of students. Formerly school policy was that no student should take foundation level papers at Junior Certificate. This is no longer the case. Analysis of the Leaving Certificate Results from the last three years show a small but significant increase in the number of less academic students.
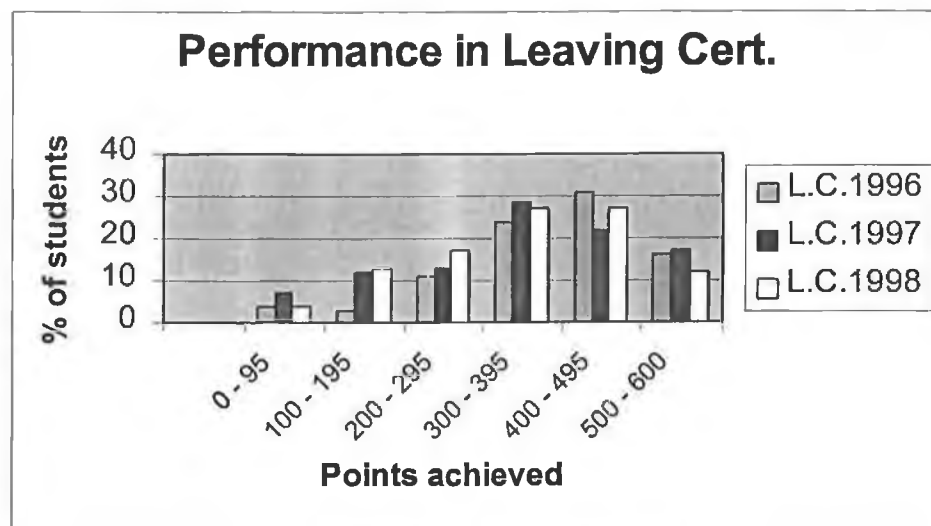
Figure 2: Performance of Leaving Certificate students in Saint Anne's 1996 -98

The Curriculum - Junior Cycle

The academic curriculum at this level is divided into core subjects which all students study and seven optional subjects from which students must select 3. Up to the academic year 1998/99 all students studied 11 subjects for examination purposes. This may increase to twelve with the possibility of Religious Education becoming an exam subject. In the past, the high academic standards of the students entering the school made it possible for them to cope with a large number of different subjects. There was concern about the work-load for the students and the subsequent pressure on teachers to prepare students for the Junior Certificate with less class contact time. These factors allied to timetabling difficulties led to a decision being taken by staff in April 1999 to remove both Music and French from the core to the option block of subjects

The core subjects for the academic year 1999/2000 are Irish, English, Maths, History, Geography, and C.S.P.E. The optional subjects are Art, Business Studies,

Classical Studies, Home Economics, French, German, Spanish, Science and Music and all students are required to take at least one modern language. In First year 37 of the 45 class periods are devoted to academic subjects. All students study the non-academic section of the curriculum and it accounts for six and a half periods in second and third year. The non-academic subjects are Religion, Singing, Games, P.E., S.P.H.E. and Drama / Public Speaking.

The number of classes in each of the optional subjects indicates the popularity of each subject.

Table 5: Subject Uptake among First Year Students in Saint Anne's

First Year Subject Choice 1999/2000			
Subject	# students from 151	Subject	# students from151
French	106 (70%)	German	30 (20%)
Spanish	30 (20%)	Science	123 (83%)
Business	95 (63%)	Music	43 (28%)
Art	72 (48%)	Home Economics	103 (68%)

One comment that can be made about the curriculum provided by the school at this level is the lack of science as a core subject. In relation to science education the White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* states:

> In view of the demands on young people of an increasingly sophisticated and technological environment, it is important that all students should receive a foundation in science and technology, augmenting the new science programme which will form an integral part of the review of social and environmental programme at primary level. Either science or a technological subject will, therefore, form part of the core programme for each student in junior cycle.[79]

The combination of no technological subject on offer with the fact that 15 – 20 % students do not study science mean that this important aspect of the curriculum is not available to all students.

The balance in the Curriculum is weighted in favour of languages. Formerly all students studied Irish, English and French while a further 65% chose a fourth language. The minimum time devoted to languages is fourteen periods (31% of the time) rising to 17 periods (38% of the time) for those students who choose four languages. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have published guidelines for a time allocation for each area of experience at Junior Cycle. In so doing it makes the point that as no one area of experience can be identified solely with a single subject that the emphasis should be on flexibility across the areas of experience rather than on the prescription of time allocations.

Table 6: Guidelines for the allocation of time at Junior Cycle[80]

Curriculum Area	Min % time	% time in St Anne's
Language, Literature and Communication		
(a) vernacular	20	22
(b) other European	10	9 minimum
Mathematical Studies & Applications	10	11
Science & Technology	12.5	9*
Social, Political and Environmental Ed.	10	15.5**
Arts Education	7.5	2 minimum
Physical Education	5	4.5
Religious & Moral Education	5	6.5
Guidance, Counselling & Pastoral Care	2.5	2
Discretionary Allocation	17.5	18.5
Total	100	100

*not all students take a subject in this category.
**includes History, Geography and C.S.P.E.

The table shows that for those students who choose science as one of their choice subjects the allocation of time in Saint Anne's corresponds reasonably well with the

recommended guidelines. Those students who choose to study two European languages spend 40% of their time in the area of Language, Literature and Communication. This could be viewed as a disproportionate amount of time allocated to one area of experience if it results in the complete exclusion of another area for some of these students.

The Curriculum - Transition Year

All students are expected to complete Transition Year. There have been exceptions to this where a students wishes to proceed directly to 5th year or where the school does not advise a particular student to take the programme. The Transition Year Programme is divided into the following categories:

- General Education
- Modular Courses
- Enterprise Afternoon
- Work Experience
- Academic Subjects

As part of their general education all students take Religious Education, Careers, Computer Studies, Choir, Games, Tourism Awareness and Log Book.

The modular courses are short self-contained units lasting 5 to 6 weeks. Students take all modules in the course of the year. The modules include Japanese Studies, Sign Language, Film Appreciation, Consumer Education, Political Education and Health Education.

The Enterprise Afternoon is so called as it is timetabled for the last four periods on a Wednesday. Students get the opportunity to do two of these activities in the course of the year. These activities include Social Awareness, Aromatherapy and Reflexology, First Aid and Technology, Pottery and Oil Painting and Drama.

Work Experience takes place for two weeks in February. This year due to student interest there was an additional two weeks work experience in May.

Three years ago it was decided to change the way subject choice was done in Transition Year. Formerly students had to decide their Leaving Certificate subjects in Third Year. The Department did not approve this practice and when the programme was assessed during the academic year 95/96 the school was advised to reconsider this policy. This practice was also adversely commented on in the Inspectors' Evaluation of Transition Year.

- A small number of schools permitted their pupils to choose their Leaving Certificate subjects at the beginning of Transition year for study during the year. This practice inhibited programme innovation, imparted an unwelcome examination orientation to the year and denied pupils the opportunity which Transition Year should afford to reflect on their future.[81]

- Pupils' decisions in relation to subject choice for Senior Cycle should be delayed until the end of Transition year. Transition year provides an obvious opportunity for the reflection and guidance which facilitates mature and considered choice by pupils. Circular 47/93 from the Department of Education explicitly states that schools will not be permitted to offer a three year Leaving Certificate programme.[82]

At present students may sample six of the optional subjects in the course of the T.Y.P. offered in Saint Anne's. They all study Irish, English Maths and a Continental Language.

The Curriculum - Senior Cycle

All students take Irish, English and Mathematics at Senior Cycle. In addition they must choose four other subjects from a list of 12 academic and 1 non-academic (i.e. Secretarial). All of these subjects are taught in mixed ability classes and there is a broad range with all major disciplines represented (Linguistic, Scientific, Social and Political, Practical, Aesthetic and Creative, Mathematical).

The non-academic subjects play an important part in the curriculum with 10 periods per week (22% time) devoted to them. There is a big emphasis on new technology here with three periods per week in T.Y. and Fifth Year in Computers and one period per week in Fifth and Sixth Year in Typing / Word Processing.

Vocational experience in Saint Anne's

Various initiatives, both curricular and extra-curricular have been tried to enhance the quality of education available to students in this area.

Secretarial Course

Saint Anne's has offered some vocational training since the late 70's at which time a classroom was equipped with thirty typewriters. In September 1980 all students in Senior Cycle had one typing class per week. In addition there was the option of doing a shorthand / typing course as one of their eight subjects. Students were prepared for the Department of Education Intermediate Typing Examination and learnt Pitmanscript. This was a popular option at that time, as indicated by the fact that there were two classes in each year. It was particularly attractive for the less able students who found the workload associated with eight academic subjects very difficult.

Over time this programme was developed to include an optional work experience component which the student did during the summer holidays of Fifth Year. This Work Experience was itself dropped when it became a standard feature of the T.Y. Programme. With the advent of computers Word Processing was also introduced and students took a Pitman Examination in Practical Word Processing.

This Option is no longer popular with the students and there is at present no class in either Fifth or Sixth Year. There are various reasons for this. In the mid 80s due to

concern being expressed about student workload it was decided to reduce the number of subjects taken by students at Senior Cycle from eight to seven. This meant that only those students with no intention of proceeding to Third Level were interested in the Secretarial Course since selecting it meant that a student had only six academic subjects, all of which would be required for points. However even with this factor there was still sufficient interest for one good-sized class.

At the moment many students take Secretarial as one of their six optional subjects in the course of Transition Year. It appears that they feel sufficiently competent at keyboard skills at the end of this introductory course. They therefore do not select the subject for Fifth year. In the academic year 1997/98 only 6 students out of a student cohort of 150 chose the subject and as a result it was not offered in the final subject choice. A similar pattern emerged with the subject choice in 1999.

There is an additional difficulty that concerns the need to rationalise how Information Technology is being offered. At present senior students get one period a week in Fifth Year in the Typing Room (which is now fully equipped with Apricot Computers) and three periods per week in Fourth and Fifth Year in Computer Studies where they prepare for the Department. Certificate in Programming in addition to learning how to use various software packages. Most of the teachers involved in offering these courses would agree that it would make more sense to offer an integrated programme (i.e. Information Technology) which would cover all the elements more efficiently. One of the reasons why this approach has not been implemented to date is due to the teaching personnel involved. There are various degrees of proficiency with computers among these teachers. Some of them would be reluctant to teach more than basic word-processing and they would be anxious that such a rearrangement of the curriculum would leave them trying to teach

students skills that they have not mastered themselves. In addition the teachers of word processing and computers have no tradition of working together and would find such a collaboration difficult.

Work Experience

As mentioned above, the first trial of Work Experience came with the Secretarial Course. The school had offered a Transition Year programme since 1978 and by 1982 all students did Fourth year. The content and emphasis of 4th year has changed considerably over this time and the first introduction of Work Experience was in the mid 80s where students had a range of options for the last two hours on a Wednesday, one of which was Work Experience. After a few years it was accepted that all students should have the opportunity for Work Experience and they now have a two-week placement immediately after the February mid-term. Over the last two years students have requested further time for work experience and in 1998/99 the Transition Year students did have two further weeks in May. This activity has traditionally been co-ordinated by the Careers Dept. and students are encouraged to find their own placement with the Careers teacher having a back-up list of businesses should a particular student have any difficulty. Students are prepared beforehand and debriefed afterwards in their Careers Class.

Mini-Company

This has always been a feature of the Transition Year. Initially an interested teacher (usually of Business Studies) volunteered to meet students in her own time to organise the Mini-Company. With the advent of the 'Enterprise Afternoon' the Mini-Company became one of the possible options on offer. There were several different teachers involved over the years and all sooner or later made the same observation, namely, that the students expected the teacher to come up with the ideas. The students were passive rather than active and the teachers found this very wearing. In fact one of the main reasons that so many teachers

were exposed to Mini-Company was because once having taught it they pleaded to be relieved of it. This led to the Co-Ordinator exploring other possibilities. The Young Entrepreneur Scheme was proposed as a possible alternative.

Young Entrepreneur Competition

This replaced the Mini-Company option in T.Y. five years ago. The first year this competition was only offered to T.Y. students but subsequently it was run in all three categories Junior (First Years), Intermediate (Second Years) and Senior (Fourth Years). A group of teachers organised a weekly market day at lunch time in the Hall to allow students to sell their wares. Initially this was very successful but it had some interesting side effects. Firstly, students who did not do well at the market day were inclined to give up or else resort to selling cakes or sweets for which customers were guaranteed. Secondly the mini-company in Transition Year grew less and less popular until finally it had to be teamed with another more popular activity (aromatherapy) to ensure a reasonable class size. This led to teacher and student frustration as the teacher tried to persuade conscripts to some show of enthusiasm. To combat this various strategies were tried. During the Academic Year 1996/97 it was decided to leave the Young Entrepreneur Competition as an optional extra-curricular activity in Fourth Year with the result that no student participated. This year it is an activity offered in the Business Studies class. The results were again disappointing with only two groups participating in the Market Day and preparing a Report for the competition.

The experience with both mini-company and Young Entrepreneur leads to the conclusion that there are very few students in the school who are attracted to such active learning. This insight should have implications for the delivery of the Enterprise module of the LCVP.

Interdisciplinary links -European Project

The school has been involved in a European Educational Project under the Comenius Scheme for the last two years. This project developed from an exchange programme with a French school where a teacher both schools liaised to organise the students' visits. This French school had links with schools in England, Germany and Norway and after a preliminary meeting in September 1996 all five schools are currently working on the project. One of the main aims of Comenius is the promotion of the use of new technology, particularly the Internet. While all partners in the project subscribed to this aim the reality has been disappointing as none of the schools have yet got satisfactory Internet access. In fact, poor communication and the difficulties of interdisciplinary work are the biggest difficulties with this project.

Interdisciplinary Links - Tourism Awareness Certificate.

This is offered as part of the T.Y. Programme. It was researched by the Co-Ordinator and another member of staff who attended in-service and then reported back to the staff. CERT issue the certificates on satisfactory completion of the course. It is left to the school to decide what is satisfactory completion. Initially there was a cross-curricular approach where different disciplines had the responsibility of incorporating different sections of the programme into their 4th year programme. The students were required to submit a project on some aspect of tourism that interested them. A satisfactory project in addition to adequate classroom participation qualified them for the certificate. To avoid a few teachers being inundated with projects it was agreed at a staff meeting that all involved in teaching 4th year (practically everyone) would look at 2/3 projects and the T.Y. team would take a second look at projects considered borderline. The administration of this worked well but it was felt students were not able to gather the strands together when it was offered to them in such a fragmented fashion. So for the last few years there is

a Tourism class timetabled for one period per week with six teachers involved. These six decide the criteria for award of the certificate. It usually involves satisfactory attendance plus the production of a tourism portfolio.

Interdisciplinary Links – Civics Certificate

This was investigated by the T.Y. Co-Ordinator and offered for the first time in the Academic Year 1997/98. The Cork Citizen Information Centre has produced a pack of ten modules. Successful completion of five entitles the student to a certificate. The modules are practical e.g. Renting for the first Time, travel Abroad, Consumer Affairs etc and are updated on a regular basis. This programme fits perfectly into the programme of General Education in Fourth Year as there are two modules timetabled for one period each per week. Some of these modules covered very similar material to that in the Civics pack and it lent them an additional validity when students realised that they would have something to show for their participation. It was decided to use attendance at the module classes as the criteria for award of the certificate rather than resort to tests or exams.

School Culture – Careers Class

Students in Senior Cycle have one Careers class per week. In Transition Year the emphasis is on the preparation for Work Experience. In Fifth and Sixth Year there are guest speakers, outings to various events such as the Higher Level Options, discussion and preparation of the C.A.O. form and practice interviews in the November of Sixth Year.

School Culture –Gaisce, the President's Awards

The T.Y. Co-Ordinator learned of the existence of this Award Scheme through an advertisement in ASTIR circa 1990. Participants set themselves goals in the areas of Community Service, Physical Activity, Personal Development and Venture. She

approached the Principal and presented it to the staff with a request for all those interested in acting as P.A.L.s (President Award Leaders) to contact her. In fact there have always been a large number of staff willing to give time in this way – so much so that it was commented on at one of the Award ceremonies. Generally students who proceed with the award complete the Bronze in T.Y. The numbers completing vary between thirty and sixty depending on the year. Some of these do continue and complete their Silver Award by the end of Fifth or Sixth Year but many find they do not have the time to do so. There has been a drop in the number of students completing the awards. This is due to a change in the rules by Gaisce. Formerly to complete the Bronze Award a participant had to complete three of the four sections. From 1997 they must complete all four sections. The least popular section with students (and their parents!) was the venture activity which required organising a walking or cycling weekend with one overnight away from home. When this became compulsory many students were either not permitted to do this activity by their parents or were unable to successfully organise it to the satisfaction of their P.A.L.

School Culture - Peace Group

School involvement in this was due to the interest of one teacher who organised the Social Awareness Programme in Transition Year. She learnt of a Peace Club being organised by St Andrew's that involved several different schools in Dublin. There were different activities associated with this group including visits to a school in the North for debates and return visits. There was a competition organised on the theme of peace for students in participating schools. It must be said that the school involvement in this project has lapsed somewhat in recent years with the departure of this teacher. However there is still a certain amount of involvement e.g. last year a

group of students participated in a Peace Day in St Andrew's which was attended by the President.

Case study of in-school curriculum development

During the Academic Year 1991/92 a discussion arose at a staff meeting about the difficulties first year students sometimes had in adjusting to such a large post-primary school. The outcome of the discussion was a decision to implement a Pastoral Care Programme for the First Year students 1992/93. Volunteers were requested to attend in-service which took place on six consecutive Tuesday evenings. The school management was willing to pay the cost of in-service for twelve teachers with Carmel Coyle and Sr Una Collins at the Marino Institute. As the number of teachers interested in attending exceeded twelve the school funded a further in-service programme during the following academic year for the balance of those interested.

As a result of what was learned at the in-service the teachers involved then met and drew up a programme that duly went into operation in September 1992. Two teachers were assigned to each incoming class, each one with responsibility for fifteen students. The class had one class per week with the Pastoral Care teacher and in addition the teacher had an allowance of at least twenty minutes per week in her timetable to enable her to meet the students on an individual basis. There was a great sense of enthusiasm among the staff involved. Teachers from many different subject areas were represented so that people who in the normal course of events would not have had occasion to work together were now doing so.

The teachers had drawn up a programme for First Year with detailed lesson plans as far as mid-term with the understanding that at this point there would be a further meeting to discuss, review and plan further. It was also decided to have a Table Quiz

at mid-term and a Christmas Pageant before the holidays for the whole first year cohort. The object of these activities was to allow students from different class groups to meet each other in a relaxed way.

That group of First Years has now left and the Pastoral Care programme offered to them no longer exists. The present First and Second Years have S.P.H.E. in its place and the present Third Years do have a Pastoral Care class on their timetable whose model has been radically changed in that there is now one class period per week with one teacher for the whole class. There is no time allowance on teachers' timetables for individual meetings with students. Thus by the start of the academic year 1999/2000 this curriculum innovation will have disappeared from the school. When the Principal announced her intention during the academic year 1997/98 to change the programme in this way the reaction of the staff wavered between apathy and relief.

When the programme came to be implemented the classroom experience in general was very positive. For many of the teachers involved the methodology was quite different to their approach to their academic subject. The programme, by its nature, required group work, role-plays and discussion. Such activities by their nature are noisier than many academic subjects and this increased noise level required some getting used to particularly for those teachers who were more used to a 'chalk and talk' approach.

It was felt that the same time and effort never went in to drawing up a programme for Second and Third Year as had been given to the First Year Course. There were various reasons given for this. The first was the lack of time in school to do such work. This illustrates the observation of Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves that:

> **Time** is another important resource which can bolster or block innovation.
> Small increments in time for teachers to work together outside class within
> the school day can make a real difference to improvement efforts.[83]

Meetings were intermittent and insufficient. In general they had to fit around the school calendar (e.g. during the mock exams) when there would be minimal disruption to classes. Clearly releasing twelve teachers simultaneously creates administrative problems.

An additional problem was that as time went by and the programme entered its second and third year more teachers were required. Some of the 'pioneers' were willing to take on a second group, others wished to take one group through to Third Year before taking responsibility for a second. Everybody agreed that it was impractical to have responsibility for more than two groups at any one time. So by the third year of the programme a minimum of twenty-four teachers and a maximum of thirty-six were required. This meant that more teachers were needed than there were original volunteers. The result was that teachers with no wish or interest in teaching the programme returned to school in September to find they had been allocated a Pastoral Care Class. Most teachers identified the recruitment of teachers with no interest in the programme as the biggest blow to its success.

> ...certainly within twelve months of Pastoral Care happening it was
> obvious it wasn't going to work. It was obvious as soon as we came back
> in the second year and people were saying "what does p.c. mean - I've got
> it on my timetable.[84]

It was at about this time that the question of textbooks arose. The first group of teachers had topics and lesson plans for the First Year classes. New teachers to the programme did not have any in-service training. Access to these materials was on an informal basis. In addition no material had been developed for the second and third year programme. Under such circumstances the demand for a textbook came from

the teachers and the school bought sixty copies of *Pastoral Care - Junior Cycle Workbook* by J. Matthew Feheney FPM.

> ...in our school our culture is we have to have material in front of us - we're quite bad at going in and talking off the cuff.[85]

This further undermined the programme as teachers relied on the textbook. The collaboration that had been a feature of the initial stages was now practically non-existent. This dependence on the textbook seems to be a feature of schools whose main focus is the achievement of good academic results.

> Textbooks are a significant, and in many cases, the only, teaching resource for teachers. ...Moreover they depend more on textbooks than on colleagues when looking for ideas for teaching their subject.[86]

Teachers who were very busy with other academic classes and who had been conscripted to Pastoral Care did not have the motivation to get involved in collaboration. Essentially the book defined the programme and its availability meant that teachers could get by with minimal preparation and reflection.

Another issue was the absence of a co-ordinator. This was realised at an early stage and it was decided to have a different co-ordinator for each year. This person was a 'volunteer' from the twelve involved. Her duty would be to arrange meetings and to co-ordinate the Halloween and Christmas celebrations. Although meetings would then occasionally be arranged teachers did not always attend. There was an increasing sense of people working separately and of Pastoral Care having a low priority among their concerns. In effect, teachers were reverting to the isolation with which they were more familiar. This isolation gave the teacher the privacy they preferred and blocked both potential criticism and support:

> Like caged birds, teachers within the culture of individualism, it seems, stick with what they know. They are reluctant to fly free, even when given the opportunity.[87]

As the programme continued some of the 'pioneers' found their enthusiasm had begun to wane.

> ...I don't know if I felt the same having taught it for a few years as I did at the outset. Sometimes you need a re-injection.[88]

Some admitted to a feeling of relief on discovering that they no longer had a Pastoral Care Class on their timetable. The balkanisation and burnout of passionate reform-minded teachers has been noted by Michael Fullan:[89]

> ..."passionate teachers" are getting exhausted in the face of "apathy and resistance"...balkanised reformers eventually burn out leaving behind more cynicism and even greater gaps between "reformers and resisters". The inevitable long-run result of such a strategy ...is a reduction in the number of teachers committed to reform.

The school was required to introduce new programmes in both C.S.P.E. and S.P.H.E. for the incoming First Year students for the Academic Year 1997/98. This constraint was exacerbated by a drop in student numbers which meant that the school lost an incremental post at the same time. It seemed obvious to allocate the time formerly given to Pastoral Care to the new S.P.H.E programme.

Conclusion

This chapter gives an overview of the school at the time the proposal to introduce the LCVP was first mooted. It represented a new opportunity for the school. However there were constraints and difficulties that needed to be considered. Previous experience with curriculum changes requiring an inter-disciplinary approach and active learning had not been uniformly successful. Furthermore the school was dealing with new administrative constraints in the areas of staffing, resources and timetabling. This dissertation proposes to examine the issues arising in the school during the initiation and implementation of the programme. The experience in Saint Anne's will be analysed in the context of comparative studies in some other schools. The research methods used will be detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research methods

There are several issues that arise when curriculum change is proposed. The purpose of this research project was to identify and consider some of the implications arising from the introduction of the LCVP in a school. What are the processes that a school goes through in the initial stages? What is the impact of the change on those working in the school? Does this change have an effect on the culture of the school? This project aimed to address such questions by reflecting on the experience of implementation in a particular school, Saint Anne's. To assess the experience in Saint Anne's it was considered important to place it in some sort of context by comparing and contrasting it with the experience in other schools. Discovering how the LCVP was being organised in these schools and identifying issues that were common or different to the experience in Saint Anne's would help identify general as well as particular outcomes.

The schools contacted represent a cross-section of schools participating in the programme. Some have more experience of the programme than Saint Anne's does and one school is at the same stage. While there are naturally many differences between these schools and Saint Anne's there is also in each case a connection or similarity which justified its selection.

School A is a large voluntary secondary school for boys situated in the same suburb of Dublin as Saint Anne's. The brothers of many of the girls attending Saint Anne's attend this school. It has been running the revised programme since September 1994. It has seen three groups complete the programme. It has, therefore, a shared history to Saint Anne's in terms of similar pupil intake, similar size and the fact that both

schools are under the trusteeship of religious orders. The major differences are that of student gender and experience of this programme.

School B is a large voluntary secondary school for girls situated in a suburb of Dublin. There are approximately 950 students. The school has been in existence since 1965. It has been designated disadvantaged. It first offered the programme in September 1996. One group of students has completed the programme and the second group will sit the Leaving Certificate in June 1999. The similarities between School B and Saint Anne's are in the size of the school, the gender of the students and the fact that both are Voluntary Secondary schools. The main contrasts are firstly the social background of the students, since this school would have a greater number of students from lower socio-economic groups and secondly its greater experience of the programme.

School C is a Community College situated in a small rural town. It was established as a result of an amalgamation of the local Vocational School and the local Voluntary Secondary School run by the religious order associated with Saint Anne's. It is now completely under the direction of the V.E.C. The school had offered the old-style LCVP and has offered the revised programme since its inception. The similarity between this school and Saint Anne's lies in the involvement of the same order as trustees to both schools. One would expect a similar ethos to prevail in both. There are clearly many points of difference, the location and nature of the school, the co-educational intake and the much greater experience of vocational programmes.

School D is a Voluntary Secondary school for girls situated in a suburb of Dublin adjoining the suburb in which Saint Anne's is located. The school is offering the programme for the first time in the academic year 1998/99. It is therefore a girls'

school at the same stage of development of the programme as Saint Anne's and is also under the trusteeship of a religious order. In contrast it has a less academic tradition.

In order to get a clear picture of the situation in these schools it seemed that a semi-structured interview would yield the most fruitful results. The appropriate person to interview was deemed to be the Co-ordinator as he/she, in theory, would be familiar with all aspects of the programme. This qualitative approach requires an element of trust between the researcher and the interviewer. In the case of each of these schools this trust was facilitated by the fact that the researcher was known to the interviewees or their colleagues prior to the interview. As a result the co-ordinators were all willing to be interviewed. The questions asked are detailed in Appendix One.

In addition one of the Development Officers on the LCVP Support Team was interviewed. The purpose of this interview was to get an insight on implementation from a more general perspective. The questions asked are given in Appendix Two.

Students

It was important to get the perspective of students as well as teachers. In order to do this a variety of methods were used. These were as follows:

- questionnaires and structured interviews with students involved in the programme
- questionnaire administered to students in the same cohort who were not involved in the programme

At the end of Transition Year (May 1998) the students were given a questionnaire in which they were asked to comment on various aspects of the programme and their experiences of the year. In addition there was a section on this questionnaire relating to the Senior Cycle and the LCVP. The questions asked are listed in Appendix

Three. Forty-six students returned questionnaires fourteen of whom were in the LCVP class.

Subsequently the students were asked to give more information at the end of their Fifth Year (May 1999). The LCVP students were each interviewed on video. The purpose of this video was threefold. Firstly to see how the students would come across on video as this is an option for their portfolio, secondly to discuss the progress of their career investigation to date and finally to ascertain their opinions and experience of the LCVP to date. The questions asked are listed in Appendix Four. Twenty of the students (i.e. 80%) presented for this interview.

The students who were not involved in the LCVP were also asked to complete a questionnaire on Friday 14th May 1999. There were 90 replies. The questions asked are listed in Appendix Five.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the detail given, the research was a mixture of qualitative and quantitative. It was felt that the semi-structured interview allowed more freedom for those directly involved in the LCVP to elaborate on points made or to introduce other issues. The written questionnaire was considered to be more straightforward for those whose knowledge of and interest in the programme was minimal.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction of LCVP in Selected Schools - Outcomes of Interviews and Surveys

Introduction

When considering any major curricular initiative there are various organisational and cultural issues that need to be addressed. The results of the questionnaires and interviews underlined various trends in relation to key features of the implementation of the LCVP into the selected schools. The organisation of the programme in these schools had the effect of highlighting certain issues. Dissemination of information to students and parents and the rationale by which students were chosen for the LCVP class had certain consequences. The influence of key personnel in the school community was significant and students'perceptions of the programme gave some interesting insights. The next two chapters will elaborate on these issues.

Organisation of the Programme

The aspect of the programme that causes difficulty for most schools is timetabling the Link Modules. In the opinion of the Development Officer the degree of difficulty depends on the school timetable. If the school is operating a forty period weekly timetable there are great difficulties finding space. Schools with forty-two periods or more per week find it easier to introduce the programme. The programme also works well where students take six academic subjects and the Link Modules as their seventh. However, very few schools do this (5% approx.) and these would generally be schools with a less academic profile. Another successful approach is to offer these classes on a modular basis where groups rotate among the teachers involved during the year. For the teachers involved a satisfactory allocation of time is extremely important.

> ...the number one need for most teachers involved in teaching the programme is not resources but that the programme is implemented on the timetable as it should be.[90]

Timetabling causes a lot of difficulty in School A. LCVP students only have one class period per week. In order to attend this class the students are obliged to miss a study period or an Irish Class (students taking Honours Irish have an extra period). This causes difficulty, as the students of Honours Irish are reluctant to miss this class. To cover the material the co-ordinator uses some of her class time in Accounting. This also causes a problem as not all the LCVP students study Accounting. Another constraint is that students do not have computer classes where they would have the opportunity to type up the work for their portfolios. The difficulties caused by these matters were left to the teacher to resolve. It is her intention to restrict access to LCVP in future to students taking Accounting, which is her subject. In this way she will have regular class contact with them and can incorporate the work for LCVP into the Accounting class. Thus the inroads on her own time and on the students' other subjects will be minimised.

In school B the Principal dealt with the timetabling of the link modules. Since all the LCVP students in this school take Business Organisation and the teacher of this subject was also the co-ordinator, one of the five periods for Business Organisation was devoted to LCVP. In addition there was one computer class per week for all students. In the case of the LCVP class this was devoted to work for the Link Modules. There was also one period per week in 5th Year when students followed a programme of general education. This period was also given to LCVP for those students involved in the programme.

In both these schools the subject taught by the co-ordinator has a significant effect on the delivery of the programme. In school A the co-ordinator intends to make her

subject i.e. Accounting a requirement for students of LCVP. This is in an effort to overcome time-tabling problems with which she is contending. Similarly, in school B students of LCVP must take Business Organisation, which the Co-ordinator teaches. This decision was made by the Principal. In both cases the time for LCVP is cutting into time for these other subjects. It is noteworthy that, in both cases, the subject involved is from the suite of Business subjects. If the Link Modules can be effectively delivered as part of a Business subject this risks undermining their current status as a separate entity. It is possible that LCVP will be seen by both students and teachers as primarily intended for those taking business subjects. 'I didn't choose LCVP because I have no interest in the Business area'.[91].The perception that LCVP is only of interest to those studying Business subjects will be reinforced by decisions, such as that taken in School A, to restrict access to the LCVP to students of Accounting. Thus, a decision taken for timetabling convenience risks impacting on the status of the programme itself.

In school C there were not the same difficulties as the Link Modules were taken by the whole cohort as part of the general education programme. Thus timetabling was the responsibility of management and students were not missing one activity in order to take these classes.

In School D the Principal showed her support for the programme by timetabling the two teachers involved together for a triple period with the LCVP students. This allows plenty of time for activity-based learning that usually requires more time than the traditional 40-minute time slot. The teachers concerned were not too clear what the rest of the students were doing during this triple period. They assumed that it was general subjects such as Religion and Games etc. In this school the teachers did

not concern themselves with the nuts and bolts of implementation. Their focus was on the delivery of the material in the classroom.

In Saint Anne's timetabling the Link Modules did not present the same logistical problems as the school operates a forty-five period week. At Senior Cycle there is an established programme of General Education that has been described in Chapter Three. Formerly students were allocated to the General Education class on the basis of their class groups for subjects such as English or Maths. In order to implement the LCVP the students involved were grouped together for all of the General Education subjects and the Link Module teachers timetabled for some of these slots.

The start-up grant

There is a start-up grant of £18,000 allocated to each school that introduces the programme. At the induction meeting guidelines are given as to how this money should be spent as follows[92]:

•	I.C.T. Equipment	£10,000
•	Audio Visual Equipment	£ 3,000
•	Equipment for the relevant subject groupings	£ 4,000
•	Resources / Seed capital for enterprise activities	£ 1,000

The Development Officer commented that in the first few years of the programme the tendency was to spend as much of the grant as possible on computers. However, now that many schools have basic computer facilities there is a tendency to spend on other equipment such as multi-media projectors.

In most of the schools surveyed the money was indeed used to fund or upgrade computer facilities. In school A the money was used to upgrade the computers in the school computer room. Management decided this allocation. In school B the money was used to buy a camcorder and LCD projector in addition to computer equipment. The Principal in School C made the comment that although the start-up grant had

equipped the Computer Room, this hardware is now obsolete with the advent of multimedia computers. In school D most of the money (£10,000 to £12,000) was spent on computers. The teachers submitted requests for the equipment they required but the final decision rested with management. The balance was spent on A.V. equipment and a LCD projector.

In Saint Anne's the money was spent exclusively on 17 multimedia computers, 15 of which were installed in a computer room, 1 in the Careers Office and 1 in the Library.

Clearly one of the attractions of this programme for schools is the generous capital grant and the favourable pupil-teacher ratio. These were certainly significant factors in the decision to introduce the LCVP in all the schools surveyed. An underlying anxiety on the part of schools to obtain extra funding has been mentioned critically in relation to the decision to implement vocationally oriented programmes.[93] Clearly if the sole motive of management in introducing a programme is to obtain funding and there is no commitment to the curricular objectives involved its implementation in the appropriate way and its long-term survival are in doubt. The key person in this respect must be the Principal as he/she is the one with the power in this area. A committed teacher or team cannot maintain a programme without the backup of resources and time that only the Principal can ensure.

Role of the Principal

In every school that implements a change the impetus must come from some individual or group. In the case of LCVP this impetus generally comes from the Principal. The Development Officer for the LCVP agreed with this and pointed out that if a school sent only one representative to the introductory in-service this person would practically always be the Principal. He mentioned that in some schools there

might be a curriculum committee whose task it is to investigate and recommend curriculum initiatives. In such a case the onus for investigating the programme would rest with this committee.

His analysis would be that there are four main issues for the Principal. Firstly, the practical difficulties of finding a space on the timetable for the Link modules, secondly selling the programme to parents, pupils and teachers, thirdly overcoming teacher prejudice against the programme and getting the support of the 4/5 key people on the staff and finally getting a handle on the vocational subject groupings. In his experience the reasons for schools that send representatives to initial briefings and subsequently do not proceed with the programme is because they encounter difficulties in these areas. The experience of the schools surveyed supports the decisive role played by the Principal in the preliminary stages.

In school A the Co-ordinator was unsure how the programme came to the attention of the school. She was on maternity leave at the time. She assumed that the Department had made the Principal aware of it. Her knowledge of it came from the Principal, who contacted her at home with the proposal that she would be co-ordinator. Clearly he had identified a member of staff who, in his opinion, could be persuaded to take responsibility for the programme. She was persuaded to accept by the promise of reduced teaching hours. The Co-ordinator now feels that this 'carrot' is unsatisfactory, as the Principal's support for the programme did not extend to finding sufficient time for the Link Modules on the timetable. Consequently she feels that this class is very time-consuming for her as much of the work encroaches on her 'free time'. She gave the example of typing up and printing students' work at home when the school printer was not working so that their portfolios would be ready in time.

In schools B and D an outside speaker (generally a member of the LCVP support team) was invited to address the staff. In school D this address to the staff occurred after the Principal had been talking about the programme for some time, looking for support for it among staff members. There was also a presentation on the LCA at the same meeting. The rationale for the meeting was, therefore, to inform the staff about the new Leaving Certificate programmes. Following the meeting a member of staff undertook to investigate further the merits of the LCVP. This person then kept other members of staff informed. In both schools the principals, in addition to timetabling the modules, are involved in deciding which students should be offered the programme. The Co-ordinator in school B was not involved in this decision. In school D the Principal showed her support for the programme by a generous time allocation to the Link Modules. In all major decisions concerning the programme she was the final authority.

School C had offered the old-style LCVP and continued to offer the revised programme. The school has, therefore, offered a vocational programme of some sort since 1989. There was a presentation to Staff by a member of the LCVP Development Team to explain the new programme. The organisation of the programme in the school is such that it is now seen as an integral part of the curriculum. The issue in this school was to adjust from the original programme to the new one.

In Saint Anne's the initial interest came from a member of staff who brought the programme to the attention of the Principal. The Principal was encouraged to proceed with the programme by the Principal and Deputy Principal of School C (in their capacity as members of the Saint Anne's' Board of Management) and by a representative of the Trustees (a former principal of the school). Once the initial

decision to investigate the programme was taken and a prospective Co-ordinator identified. a member of the LCVP Support Team was invited to address the Staff. The presentation was well received and the staff supported the proposal to introduce the programme into the school should there be sufficient interest among the students. The Principal attended the introductory in-service on implementing the programme. She was extremely anxious that the programme should get the time it required and requested a detailed submission from the Co-ordinator as to how the Link Modules should be timetabled. The time requested was duly allocated. The LCVP team presented a rationale for selecting students for the class to her, which she endorsed.

The Co-Ordinator and team

Although the support of the Principal is crucial in introducing the programme the general experience of the Development Officer is that very soon the Co-ordinator or the LCVP team of teachers take over the task of promoting the programme. He felt that ideally the LCVP team would have a Business teacher, an I.T. teacher and a Guidance Counsellor. This would form the basis for a very sound core that in time could grow to include some teachers from the Vocational subject groupings. He felt that it was useful to have a person with a Business background on the team but it is not essential for the Co-ordinator to have such a background. This knowledge is easy to pick up for someone who is sufficiently motivated. This ideal situation did not pertain in any of the schools visited.

He sounded a note of warning as regards the personnel involved in that he has noticed that the program starts with a very committed teacher who runs out of steam after a few years:

> ...unless the school is very careful the programme can be given to E.P.T. teachers and people who can't say no. ...no doubt about it that young teachers have a lot of enthusiasm but I think the programme needs someone with a bit of maturity and a bit of weight in the school who can

> stand up for the programme and make sure that it doesn't lose out because every year there's going to be a battle between competing forces on the staff for timetabling time, concessions, resources and unless you have some people with some experience and some weight fighting for LCVP it can become sidelined or side-tracked very easily.[94]

In School A the Co-ordinator works with one other member of staff. These two form the team and have worked together since the programme was introduced to the school. The two work well together and she feels that this continuity is important for the delivery of the programme. The Co-ordinator stated that the Career Guidance teachers are not interested in becoming involved in the programme and she feels that interest in and knowledge of the programme is minimal among colleagues. The Co-ordinator feels somewhat isolated in this situation. This teacher does not have a post in the school, despite considerable teaching experience, due to the fact that she was redeployed there comparatively recently. This, allied with the unsatisfactory timetabling arrangements for the Link Modules in the school, illustrates the comment made above by the Development Officer. If this teacher had a longer history in the school with the 'weight' that this would imply she might have more success in getting the time she needs.

In school B, after the input from the outside speaker, the Principal asked members of staff to indicate whether they were interested in getting involved in the programme. The Co-Ordinator indicated that there was no great interest among the staff in general but she decided to volunteer her services. She is described by her Principal as being a very dedicated teacher who is prepared to spend a lot of time on her students even 'the really daft ones'.[95] She is the main provider of the programme. There is no team as such but she does find some other members of staff helpful with certain activities.

In school C, the Co-ordinator described himself as a 'volunteer'. Unusually, the co-ordinator in this school has no class contact with the students. He functions as an administrator, whose job is to ensure that portfolios are ready by the due dates etc. The delivery of the programme is left to the class teacher and the Co-ordinator had little information on the classroom activities taking place. The impression given is of teachers of the Link Modules working separately with little co-ordination or interaction either with each other or with the Co-ordinator. In all the other schools the Co-ordinator is involved in the delivery of the programme – usually in the Enterprise section.

In school D the two teachers involved in delivering the programme were contacted by the Principal during the summer holidays and informed that they would be teaching the programme in September. They had previously indicated a certain interest. There was 'no queue' of teachers interested in this job '…we didn't have to fight off opponents'.[96]

Both teachers work closely together in preparing and delivering the programme. Their ability to do this is facilitated by the timetabling arrangements and the provision of a dedicated LCVP Office and telephone line.

In Saint Anne's there were several teachers on the staff who had been actively promoting the programme prior to its introduction. They had indicated a willingness to become involved in its introduction and delivery to students. Between them there was a broad area of experience. One had been the Transition Year Co-Ordinator for eight years, one teaches I.T. and one is a Guidance Counsellor. None of these have experience in the Business subjects.

Dissemination of information to students/parents

In the experience of the Development Officer the dissemination of information depends to a certain extent on the culture of the school. Generally there is an information meeting at which the programme is explained, particularly when it is being introduced to the school. In the first year of the programme many schools wait until after the students have made their subject choice before discussing LCVP. In subsequent years it is introduced to the students before they make their choice. Some schools introduce it for the whole cohort. Generally this would happen in Vocational schools where most students would be eligible for the programme in any case due to their subject selection. Finally, there are some situations where students who do not comply with the requirements of the programme are placed in the LCVP class.

> ... that's caused a problem. Teachers who are in that situation have said it's very difficult to motivate the non-LCVP student.[97]

The Development Officer gave an example of one school whose Principal described the parents as not being supportive. In this case the Principal focussed on the students, as they would be the ones making the decision. The schools surveyed also had a variety of approaches.

In School A there is a meeting for the parents of Third Year students about the Senior Cycle. The main thrust of this meeting is Transition Year but there are also presentations on the subject choice for Leaving Certificate and the LCVP. This is presumably to facilitate students who skip Transition Year. There is no equivalent meeting at the end of Fourth Year before students make their subject choice. The first group in this school to do LCVP were Fifth Year 94/95 and there were twenty-one students in this group. At that time it was difficult to identify possible students as the school policy was that students would choose their Leaving Certificate subjects at the end of Third Year. This meant that it was necessary to approach

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individual students with the correct combinations of subjects and persuade them to take the programme. This is no longer a problem as the school has changed its policy in this area and subject choice is now delayed until the end of Transition Year. Next year the Co-ordinator intends to tell interested students that they must do Accounting. She will then be able to cover LCVP material in the Accounting class. The reason for this is due to timetabling difficulties with the Link Modules that have been previously described.

School B also had 21 students in the first group. There were meetings held to inform parents. The Co-ordinator said that the number of meetings held varied from year to year. The first year there were two meetings, the second year there were three meetings and the third year they only held one. The rationale for these extra meetings was that not all parents were able to attend the first meeting. It was decided by management to restrict the programme to students who had Home Economics, Business and a foreign language.

School C also holds a meeting for parents. However the classes involved in LCVP are presented as part of the General Education programme taken by all students. The separate nature of the LCVP is not stressed at this meeting. Student allocation to these classes is on the basis of the choice subjects studied at a particular period. This means that each Link Module class contains a mixture of eligible and non-eligible students.

School D did not have a meeting for parents. On the return to school in September 1998 it was decided to restrict access to the programme to students taking Home Economics and Biology. There were approximately 45 students with this combination of subjects. Twenty-five of these students were given an information leaflet about the LCVP and invited to join the class.

We selected pupils that we thought probably would be most appropriate and get the most from the course ... expected behaviour came into the category as we selected pupils that we thought would be positive towards the course.[98]

Academic ability was not a deciding factor in the selection of students. The chosen students had the weekend to think about it and discuss the issue with their parents. All of them decided to join the class. The teachers involved had not decided how to deal with this for next year's group. There had been indications from other members of staff that entry to the programme should be broadened. A certain amount of resentment has been expressed that the 'well-behaved' students have been creamed off leaving other members of staff to cope with the more unruly elements.

The experience in Saint Anne's was different in some respects from the other schools. It was decided to wait until the students had made their subject choice for Fifth Year before informing them of the programme. It was impossible to anticipate student interest in the programme and the Department of Education and Science had sanctioned only one class. The team felt that dealing with a smaller group would be easier from the point of view of disseminating information and of minimising disappointment if student interest exceeded the number of places available. It was also felt important that the subject choice should not be influenced by the introduction of the LCVP. The teachers involved felt that students should not pick their subjects for Leaving Certificate simply to be eligible for the programme. They felt that students' choice of subjects should not be unduly influenced by a new programme with which the teachers themselves were inexperienced. There was also a concern that an overly enthusiastic endorsement of the LCVP might distort the subject choice to the detriment of some subjects and a consequent withdrawal of support among those teachers whose classes might be affected.

When the subject choice had been made there were 71 students with eligible subject combinations. Initially the LCVP was explained briefly to these students and they and their parents were invited to an information meeting that was held in the evening at school. Thirty-six students and/or their parents attended this meeting. Subsequent to this meeting the students were asked to return a slip, signed by their parents, indicating their interest in doing the LCVP. Twenty-eight students duly did so. The selection of students for the class was made on the basis of subject combinations. All students with Home Economics and Biology (twenty-one students) or Physics and Chemistry (five students) were invited to join the class and requested to accept their place in writing. The following September three of these students had changed school. This meant that the two remaining interested students (Link subjects: Home Economics and Business Organisation) joined the class. In practice all interested students got a place in the class. A similar process was used in the second year of involvement to disseminate information to students entering 5th Year 1999/2000. The team intends to change this procedure in subsequent years due to feedback from students who feel that this selection procedure was unfair in that some were automatically excluded.

> I think that you should explain the LCVP to the whole year at once next year because people were angry and annoyed because they didn't know why they weren't picked to do it and didn't understand about the LCVP
>
> I have no idea about LCVP, nobody explains anything properly to us, the students.[99]

It was interesting to evaluate how effective this process was as a way of imparting information. When interviewed in May 1999, many of the LCVP students said that even after this information session they were still unclear about what the programme entailed and specifically what kind of work they could expect to be doing in class.

> I didn't have a clue what it was about but I knew it would help me after school.
>
> I didn't know what to expect.

I didn't know what to expect but it sounded interesting and I'm up for new challenges.[100]

Staff Involvement

The perception of the programme by staff is rated as a difficulty in the experience of many schools. Before it is introduced to a school there is a general idea that it is geared at the weaker non-academic students. 'Overcoming prejudice is a big one in the staff'.[101] The word 'vocational' probably has a lot to do with this added to the fact that many teachers are not well-informed about the new programmes at Leaving Certificate. A reluctance to engage in change is another factor mentioned by the Development Officer.

> Most people still feel that anything other than 'the' Leaving Certificate is of lesser value.[102]

Once the programme exists in the school there is a distinction between those teachers involved in the delivery of the programme and other members of staff who '...haven't a clue and don't want to know.'[103]

The experience of the schools surveyed illustrates some of these points. In school A it is the opinion of the Co-ordinator that the fact that the Link Modules are now recognised for points at third level will increase the status of the programme. This year during discussions about introducing the Leaving Certificate Applied to the school some teachers expressed surprise as they were under the impression that LCA was already offered in the school. This confusion of the LCVP and the LCA is possibly due to the use of the word 'vocational' in the title of the former. It is the opinion of the co-ordinator that the use of this word in the programme title had a negative and misleading effect on pupils, parents and teachers in the past

In school B the Careers teachers take it in turns to teach the Preparation for Work module with the class. Other teachers help the students with particular activities, e.g.

the Computer teacher allows them to type up their reports in her class, the Home Economics and Art teachers help the students with the annual enterprise activity of preparing a special meal for teachers. The rest of the staff do not seem to have much involvement other than the fact that there is a great interest in getting a ticket for this special teachers' lunch. It was felt that it was unfair that the same teachers should go every year when places were limited.

In school C the programme was originally perceived as being geared at the weaker students. This has now disappeared due to the fact that all students take these classes. There would seem to be minimal involvement by teachers other than those teaching the programme. The Co-ordinator does not get involved in the delivery of the programme. He leaves decisions about the activities to these teachers and concentrates on ensuring that the students deliver their course work on time.

In school D the class is a mixed ability group. The teachers indicated that this would be the norm in the school. The two teachers involved in teaching the programme are very enthusiastic about it. They are timetabled together to teach the class for a triple period each week and they spend a good deal of time preparing these classes. Other teachers in the school have not become infected by this enthusiasm. 'Other staff don't want to get involved, they just view it as a lot of work'.[104]

Colleagues have also expressed a certain amount of resentment that well-behaved, motivated students were selected for the programme. Essentially this means that other teachers are left dealing with a more difficult group of students.

Some of the attitudes described above exist in Saint Anne's also. A year after the programme had been introduced into the school some teachers were still confused about the difference between LCA and LCVP. Comments were made, both to

students and staff, about how wonderful it is that there is something there for the weaker student.[105] However there is a feeling of goodwill towards the programme. This goodwill shows itself in practical ways when members of staff allowed themselves to be interviewed by students as one of the activities and provided help and advice to the pupils and teachers involved when requested. In addition many teachers would occasionally enquire of the Co-ordinator about how things were going. Such queries seem to be inspired more by a desire to show support to another colleague than a burning interest in the programme itself.

Interdisciplinary Work

A definition of the LCVP given to participants at the introductory inservice was as follows:

LCVP strengthens the vocational dimension of the Leaving Certificate by:-

- Linking and relating specific Leaving Certificate subjects
- Adding three Link Modules which sharpen the vocational focus[106]

In the view of the Development Officer putting this theory into practice is an area of crucial importance for the programme.

> The most serious challenge for LCVP in the future is to try and make it what its supposed to be and it is supposed to be an enhancement of the whole Leaving Certificate and where that's happening its great to see. Where it's not happening you wonder how long that particular teacher or group of teachers can sustain it.[107]

Developing a cross-curricular approach with the teachers of the Link Subjects would seem to be an essential part of delivering the programme as it is conceived. Such inter-disciplinary links can be difficult to develop and maintain in a school situation:

> In far too many schools the LCVP is simply a bolt-on to the curriculum and there you have the poor co-ordinators overworked in a corner trying to keep the programme going without the resources that they need.[108]

In the schools surveyed this aspect of the programme is indeed problematic. The two schools with the longest experience of the programme (Schools A and C) do not have

an inter-disciplinary approach in any real sense. School B has some input from other teachers. The two schools that are new to the programme, School D and Saint Anne's, have made some effort to involve teachers of the Link Subjects. In School D the Home Economics teachers agreed to cover Home Buying in class at the same time a similar topic was being covered in the Link Modules. In Saint Anne's LCVP students organised an outing for the Physics class to Intel. However, these are very modest examples of cross-curricular activity and the experience of the other schools would not allow one to be overly optimistic about future developments in this area.

Work Experience

The Development Officer feels that there is no substitute for a Work Experience placement, even if it is in an area not directly relevant to the career the student is interested in. In his opinion the experience of being in a work place is invaluable to the student.

> Yet one of the chief lessons which seems to be emerging from such programmes …is the way in which they both can enable young people to learn some things more effectively than they could in classrooms, and to develop in young people a stronger motivation for classroom learning.[109]

He does not think that a career investigation should replace Work Experience. He suspects that when schools ask if they have to do Work Experience that they are really looking to find a way to do the minimum required by the programme. He accepted that in many schools students use their part-time job or their Work Placement from Transition Year to fulfil the LCVP requirement.[110]

In school A Work Experience is not formally organised. Students either write up an account of the Work Experience undertaken in Transition Year or use their part-time jobs for this section. A new development in this school is that they have an increasing number of students who are skipping T.Y. This will become an issue for the LCVP if these students are in the class without T.Y. work experience to fall back

on. In school B students do Work Experience for one week immediately before Easter. As all students in this school do not do T.Y. this work experience follows the traditional form. In school C the students use their part-time work as work experience for their portfolio. School D intends to pursue the option of Career Investigation rather than Work Experience with its students.

In Saint Anne's the team decided to pursue the option of a Career Investigation with the LCVP in order to make a distinction between the activity here and the Work Experience placement in Transition Year. The intention was for the student to investigate a particular career and, where possible, to organise work shadowing. This did not turn out as planned since the careers chosen by some students in the para-medical field did not lend themselves to work shadowing due to issues of patient confidentiality. In addition, the activity was introduced too late in the school year to be completed before the summer holidays. This was due to the inexperience of the teachers involved.

School-Business Links

The LCVP requires teachers to adapt their role. They act more as a facilitator and mentor rather than solely as an instructor since it is important that students take ownership for the activities and become involved at all stages. This shift in roles although difficult can be rewarding for both parties. The Co-ordinator in School D commented that he feels that his involvement in the programme has had a beneficial effect on his teaching of other classes.

> It's given a lift to our teaching – trying to introduce the ideas from LCVP into other classes.[111]

Two of the Link Modules, Preparation for Work and Work Experience aim to provide insight into the world of work. It may seem somewhat problematic to expect teachers, very many of whom have little or no experience of the world outside

education, to deliver such a programme within the confines of an institution that is relatively closed to the outside world. However, teachers can overcome such restrictions by rethinking their role:

> Teachers, can, however, remedy their deficiencies in experience if they conceive of their role not as experts on everything, but as managers of learning resources.[112]

An example of such a resource is the use of Adults Other than Teachers (AOTs) in the learning process either by inviting such people into the school or by the students visiting the workplace of the AOT.

> The AOTs are themselves a valuable human resource, and in addition they often have access to other resources which greatly add to the value of their input.[113]

An effective way of dealing with this aspect of the programme is by exploiting a school-business link if one exists or by establishing one if it does not.

School A has established a business link with Motorola and Tesco. The co-ordinator finds this works well and employees of Motorola visit the class regularly. There would be one or two visits outside the school per year. These usually take the form of a visit to a Trade Fair or a Careers Exhibition. In School B there is a business link with the ESB. This was developed through sheer persistence on the part of the co-ordinator. She rang many different businesses until she got a positive response. They organise one to two visitors and visits per year. In school C the Enterprise teacher sets up a visit to local businesses. There is no formal school-business link. In school D they have developed a very successful business link with a local company. The teachers have found this Company very helpful. It has invited members of the staff to Company events. This link was established thanks to a parent who had a connection with the Company prior to the introduction of LCVP.

In Saint Anne's this is probably the element of the programme that requires most work. The school does not have a business link. The Co-ordinator intends to devote some time and energy to finding an interested Company in the second year of implementation. The students themselves expressed disappointment with this aspect of the programme: 'I thought that there would be more visitors in and outings'.[114]

Conclusion

In this chapter the data generated from the interviews and conversations conducted with teachers and others involved in the delivery of the LCVP.has been described. This has been done thematically the better to identify points of similarity and contrast between the target school and the others. The next chapter examines the responses of the students to their experience of the programme. A cross-section of students were surveyed including those who are currently studying the LCVP, those who were eligible for the programme but decided against participation, those who did not have the necessary subject requirements and finally those for whom the programme held no interest.

CHAPTER SIX

Students' experience of the programme.

Introduction

Given the nature of the LCVP with its emphasis on student involvement and active learning it seemed appropriate to consult the students themselves in order to gain an insight into if and/or how the introduction of this new curricular initiative impacted on them. This aspect of implementation can be neglected by the teachers involved in their concentration on practical matters. This has been noted by Michael Fullan:

> ...we hardly know anything about what students think about educational change because no one ever asks them.[115]

However, in the case of a programme such as the LCVP the students' opinions are important since the value placed by the students on an innovation has implications for its continuance.

The students involved in the programme have a very pragmatic approach to it. In the opinion of the Development Officer the students have two main concerns; firstly will the programme involve extra work and secondly will this extra work help them in their career.

Recognition of LCVP at Third Level

The fact that the Link Modules are now recognised for points by the Universities is now being used very much as a selling point to pupils and parents when schools are marketing the programme.

> ...around the country there has been a general sense of relief that it has been recognised by the universities because now its sort of seen as being there to stay.[116]

This pragmatic view is supported by co-ordinators' observations on students' reactions to the programme and also in students' own responses. The Co-ordinator

in School A felt that the fact that the Link Modules were not recognised by the Universities made students suspicious of the programme. It is her opinion that this recognition will make the programme much more attractive.

In School B the Co-ordinator did not have a strong opinion on whether the recognition for points would make the LCVP more attractive to the students. She felt that points were not a major consideration for the students in the school although the Principal commented that previously some students had indeed used the points from the Link Modules to gain a place on courses in Institutes of Technology. Students in this school do not refer to points at all. They mention such things as teamwork, organisational skills, confidence and time management.

> It's not just out of a book – it's first hand experience.
> LCVP helped give me confidence, developed working on your own, not the teacher saying, it's up to you.[117]

Initially in school C there was some resistance among students to completing the course requirements as they wished to concentrate on academic subjects and they could see that some of their number did not have to complete the portfolio. This reinforces an observation made by the Development Officer.

> If students are not willing participants then there can be difficulties, particularly when it comes to putting the portfolio together.[118]

The issue of points did not seem to be particularly relevant to students in this school.

In School D the fact that LCVP is recognised for points is an attractive but not vitally important element of the programme for their students. Many of their students would not be considering proceeding to Third Level in any case.

Observations of LCVP students

In Saint Anne's the students were forthright when asked why they decided to do the LCVP. Four (20%) said that points were the deciding factor. All the other students

mentioned the practical aspects of the course (filling in application forms, writing letters, telephoning and interviewing people and preparing a C.V.) as significant factors in their decision. They also felt that it sounded interesting and that they would have an advantage over other students who had not followed the programme.

> I felt that I would be missing out if I didn't do it
> I had the choice and I couldn't think of any reason why I shouldn't do it. I felt that I was lucky to have the opportunity.[119]

Their experience of the programme to date is generally positive, although many of them (50%) mentioned that it involved more work than they had thought. However a sizeable minority did not feel that it was particularly time-consuming. When asked where the time was needed they replied that organising activities, e.g. telephoning, writing letters, arranging meetings took up more time than they would have thought. In addition, they found writing up the reports of these activities and having them ready by a deadline time-consuming.

> ...lot of work but it's very enjoyable. Don't realise until you're doing it yourself.
> ...it's a lot of work – not a doss subject. ...have to take responsibility for work yourself
> it doesn't take more time than its worth. It isn't so much academic subjects its extra stuff[120]

Interestingly, when asked in May 1998 whether they had any worries or reservations about participating in the programme 78.5% of the LCVP students who responded mentioned the extra work.

> I feel it is going to be a lot of hard work and I'll have to work hard.
> ...maybe I might fall behind in the extra work.[121]

Clearly the students are divided on this issue. Some students organise their time well and do not find the work requirement for LCVP unduly onerous. This group of students does not consist exclusively of the more academically able but includes also those students who enjoy activity-centred learning. Some students seem to view such work as less valuable than 'real' (i.e. academic) work.

> ...from what I know it seems to be a bit of a doss class – like a lot of
> Fourth Year work.
>
> I'd say it would be your own personal choice to do LCVP. Maybe a
> weaker student or somebody interested in project or group work[122]

While these comments were made by students who were not involved in the programme they indicate an attitude that is common among a substantial group of teachers and parents in addition to students. Overcoming such prejudice represents a significant challenge for the future development of the LCVP.

Most of the students mentioned the experience of teamwork, which they felt was very positive as it boosted their confidence and their communication skills. A few of the students pointed out the difficulties of working in teams when some people do not do as much work as others.

> It builds up your confidence, working in teams – not a lot of people pull
> their weight in their team groups
>
> Teamwork – getting used to listening to what other have to say.
>
> It was a good way of getting to know the girls in the class.[123]

Most of the students felt that they had benefited from the class. They felt that they would leave school better prepared for the world of work. They felt more confident, better able to communicate and that they had learnt practical skills (e.g. telephone techniques, letter-writing and c.v.) which would stand them in good stead.

> ... it made me confident, out of my shell, not as nervous talking to people
> in authority
>
> ...really interesting, advantage to do it, learning but fun at the same time.
>
> its easier for us to talk to groups than the other 5th years – we're benefiting
> more than them.[124]

While the students were generally happy with their experience, they did have a few criticisms:

> ...bad side – having to have things done and the pressure
>
> Too much work at the same time.[125]

Observations of non-participating students

Unsurprisingly the students' who were not involved in the programme had a very different outlook. The results of the questionnaires of these students show that introduction of the LCVP has had very little impact on them. In the words of one student.

> Sorry I can't be of more help but nobody other than those involved know much about the class.[126]
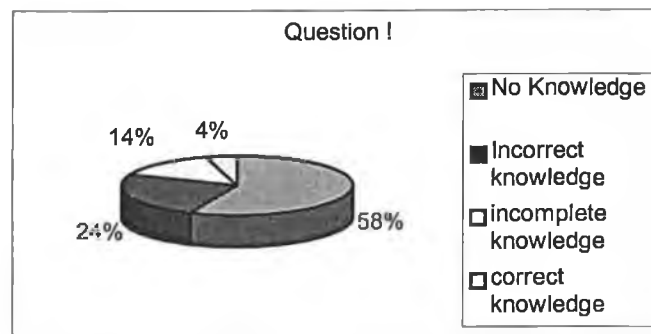
Question 1: What are the aims of the LCVP?

Figure 3
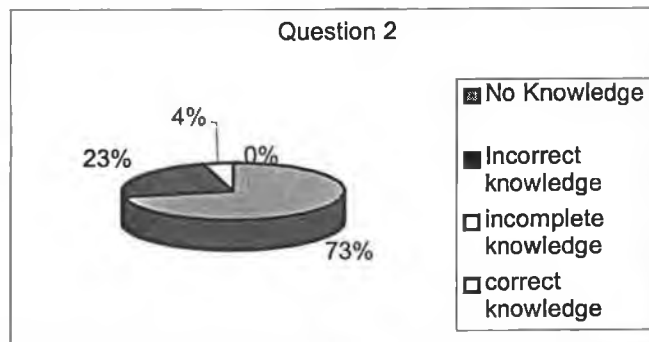
Question 2: What extra subjects do LCVP students do?

Figure 4
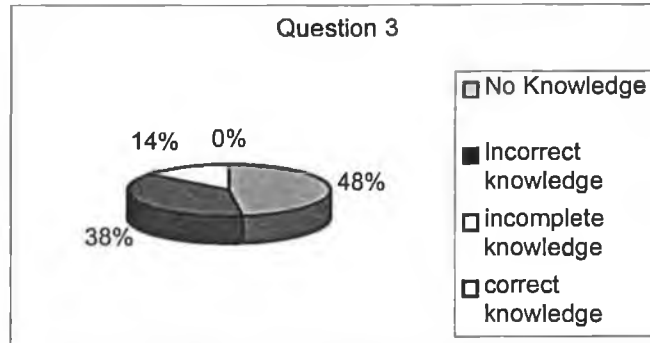
Question 3: What kind of exam do they do in these subjects and when do they do these exams?

Figure 5

The reason that almost a quarter of respondents had incorrect knowledge is due to the way that the LCVP class is organised in the target school. The group stays as a unit for all general subjects including R.E., Games, Computers and Word Processing. The Word Processing teacher decided to prepare the group for a Pitman exam. As the LCVP students were the only ones to do this exam it is understandable that other students might see it as part of the course requirements. This explains also the high percentage of incorrect information (38%) given in answer to Question Three.
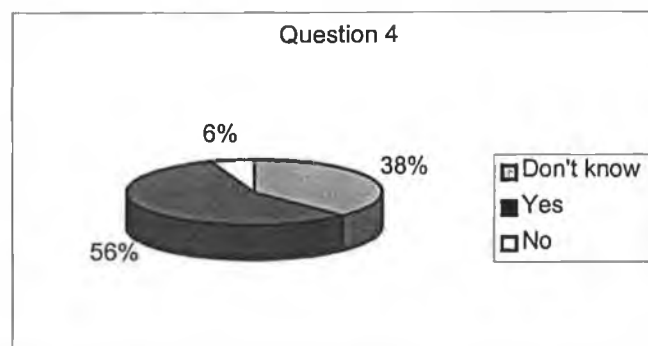
Question 4: Are these subjects eligible for points at Third Level?

Figure 6

None of the students who knew that the Link Modules were eligible for points could say exactly how many points were awarded to them. One student's answer to this

question, 'Yes but not in a good college', neatly illustrates the difficulty attached to overcoming prejudice.
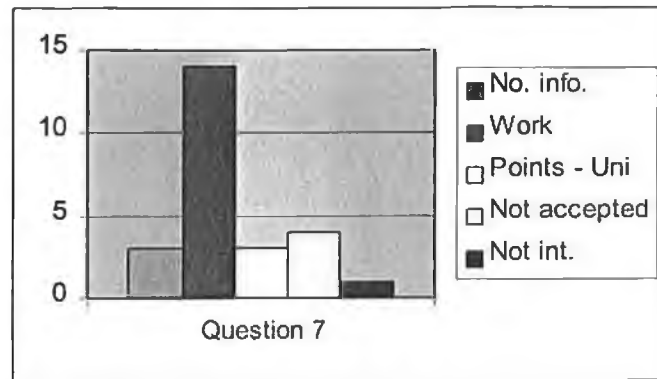
Question 7: If you had the correct subject combinations to do LCVP why did you decide not to apply for a place in the class?

Figure 7

The responses to Question Seven show that for most of the students who decided against the LCVP the significant reason was the amount of work involved. As this was also an important consideration for the LCVP students it would seem that the former group concluded that the student outcomes were not sufficiently rewarding to justify the work involved. Some of the comments made in conjunction with this question illustrate clearly the reasoning.

> I didn't think it would be much use as it is not recognised by most colleges.
> I wasn't interested in going to the DITs in particular.
> ...from what I hear it takes up a lot of time that could be used for studying something more academic.
> Too much extra work and time involved – seven subjects enough for me
> I couldn't risk losing the points.[127]
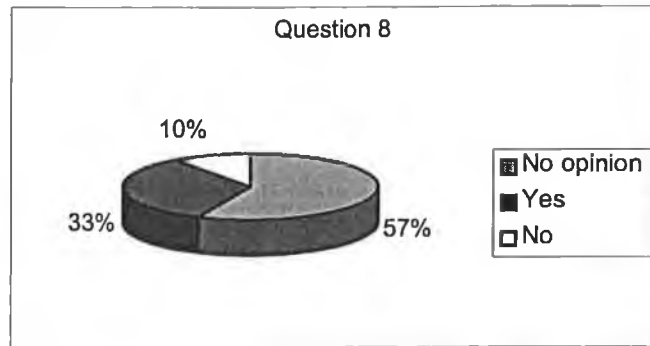
Question 8: Would you advise incoming 5th Year Students to take LCVP or not?

Figure 8

Conclusion

The responses of the students in this chapter show that decisions made by management and teachers have an impact on students' perceptions of the programme. Some of their reactions were unforeseen by those concerned with implementation. In general, those students participating in the programme were satisfied with their experience. However, the programme has not had a significant impact to date on the wider student group.

The final chapter considers the issues raised in Chapters Five and Six from a wider perspective in order to see if general conclusions about the initiation and implementation of a curricular initiative can be made from the particular experience of these schools with LCVP.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Placing the LCVP experience in a wider context

Introduction

This dissertation attempts to analyse the experience of one school when initiating and implementing a curricular change. Comparing this experience with that of other schools who have introduced or are introducing the same programme serves to illustrate in what respects the experience in Saint Anne's coincides and differs from elsewhere. More generally, it may shed light on the relationship between the general research on curriculum innovation and the practical experience of an Irish school.

Michael Fullan gives the following overview of the change process:[128]

Initiation ⇔ Implementation ⇔ Continuation ⇔ Outcome

An individual or group, for whatever reasons, initiates or promotes a certain programme. If this advocacy is successful there is a phase of attempted use (implementation) which will have greater or lesser degrees of success. Continuation is when the programme is sustained beyond the first year or two. Finally the outcome can be described as the degree of school improvement in relation to given criteria.

> Results could include, for example, improved student learning and attitudes; new skills, attitudes, or satisfaction on the part of teachers and other school personnel; or improved problem-solving capacity of the school as an organization.[129]

While this description represents a simplification of a very complex process it does offer a framework in which one can present the results of this work. The focus of this research was primarily on the first two elements of the above equation.

Initiation

Fullan identifies eight factors associated with Initiation as follows:[130]

- Existence and Quality of Innovations
- Access to Innovations
- Advocacy from central Administration
- Teacher Advocacy
- External Change Agents
- Community Pressure / Support / Apathy
- New Policy – Funds (Federal / State / Local)
- Problem-Solving and Bureaucratic Orientations

A combination of these factors interacting together led to Saint Anne's interest in this programme. Firstly there was the advocacy of interested members of staff, supported by pressure from influential members of the school community (trustees and members of the Board of Management).

> The primacy of personal contact in the diffusion of innovations has been known for years[131]

This was reinforced by external factors consisting of the promotion of the programme by the Department of Education and Science, which promised inservice training for staff involved in the programme, extra funding for the school and a favourable pupil-teacher ratio.

> ...new policies, especially if accompanied by funds, stimulate and sometimes require initiation of change at local level.[132]

The incentive of teacher allocation was very significant in Saint Anne's where a contraction in pupil numbers was leading to timetabling difficulties and anxiety about jobs among staff.

> Districts welcome external funds and/or policies either as an opportunity to obtain extra resources ... or as a chance to solve particular local problems.[133]

All the schools contacted had upgraded computer facilities and/or audio-visual equipment as a result of their involvement.

Clearly there was a combination of factors interacting which together acted as an irresistible force for change.

> Organisations are dynamically conservative: that is to say, they fight like mad to remain the same. Only when an organisation cannot repel, ignore, contain or transform the threat, it responds to it. But the characteristic is that of least change: nominal or token change. [134]

Without the support of the principal the initiation process cannot begin. Teachers also have a significant part to play. They will be the ones required to deliver the programme and the process cannot proceed without willingness by staff to become involved. In all the schools teachers were persuaded or volunteered to get involved with this programme. This supports a general finding that teachers do innovate:

> …many teachers are willing to adopt change at the individual classroom level and will do so under the right conditions (e.g. an innovation that is clear and practical, a supportive district administration and principal, opportunity to interact with other teachers, and outside resource help). [135]

Fullan recommends consideration of relevance, readiness and resources as part of the initiation process. Relevance combines teachers' understandings of how the change will be implemented with an acceptance of its benefits. Readiness refers to both the individuals' and the institution's level of preparedness. Resources refer to issues of equipment, time and personnel. It is important that these are considered prior to implementation.

> When the system imposes formal ideas on the system without a broad-based mobilization strategy, the ideas tend to fail, thereby adding credence to the "this too shall pass" constituency. [136]

In the schools surveyed discussion prior to implementation focussed primarily on the content of the programme itself. One could not say that there was a 'broad-based mobilization strategy' in operation.

Implementation

> The relationship between initiation and implementation is loosely coupled and interactive. The process of initiation can generate meaning or confusion, commitment or alienation, or simply ignorance on the part of participants and others affected by the change. [137]

Educational change impacts on the organisation and the people in it. It is a learning experience for all involved not just the students. Decisions in one area impact on another. Some outcomes will be unforeseen. It is important that participants in a curriculum innovation realise and accept these realities.

> School life is a complex process, like a cobweb, which when touched at any point will have repercussions for the whole school and sometimes in the most unexpected places.[138]

The role of the principal

In such a situation leadership is extremely important.

> ...change of the kind we are describing engages both our intellect and our emotions; it may impinge on people's value systems; it not only affects individuals but also the organization, its structures, its norms and its environment. Consequently, it will not happen successfully unless it is promoted, steered or facilitated with all these crucial factors being taken into account.[139]

This leadership, in the first instance, must come from the Principal. If a Principal is not in favour of a particular course of action he/she has the power of veto. The Principal is also the person who has the power to create an organisational climate that would favour success. In the case of the LCVP the first decision by the Principal in all the schools was to organise the presentation of the programme to staff.

Saint Anne's is a school with a reputation for discipline and good academic results. This latter is clearly a crucial factor for the students as shown by their comments in interviews and questionnaires

> I want to do Engineering, Law or Medicine – all high points. I don't need the hassle of another exam that has lower points. I know that school shouldn't be about just getting points but the system at the moment is ensuring that it stays that way.[140]

This expectation on the part of students and parents for an academic emphasis creates a pressure on both staff and management.

> Many parents, who have a choice, choose to place their children in schools that are good on school discipline and pupil behaviour, and who get good results. This does influence principals' priorities both with respect to what they wish their staff to attend to, and the issues which principals themselves attend to and do not attend to.[141]

When introducing a programme such as LCVP with its non-academic emphasis in such a school it was essential to transmit a conviction of its value. Doing this successfully required supportive actions as well as rhetoric from the Principal. In Saint Anne's this support was demonstrated by taking care to allocate the necessary time to the Link Modules and the recommended time allowance to the co-ordinator. This was the most obvious way to indicate support for the programme and sent a powerful message to the school community about the value of the programme.

> Principals' actions serve to legitimate whether a change is to be taken seriously (and not all changes are) and to support teachers both psychologically and with resources.[142]

Thus Saint Anne's avoided some of the difficulties associated with time allocation that caused such problems for students and teachers in School A. Similarly, the Principal of School D demonstrated her unequivocal support for the programme by her allocation of time and resources.

The Principal in Saint Anne's was anxious to present LCVP to parents and students as something that she fully supported and with which she was familiar. She sanctioned teachers' attendance at in-service during the course of the year. She did not play as controlling a role as the principals in the other schools in such matters as student selection and purchase of equipment. Naturally she had final approval in such matters but, in general, accepted the recommendations of the co-ordinator and team. It would be fair to say that her concerns were administrative but that in this domain she gave the programme as much support as she was able.

> The expectation that principals should be leaders in the implementation of changes that they had no hand in developing and may not understand is especially troublesome. Given the other demands on the role, it is no

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wonder that most principals do not approach their change responsibilities with enthusiasm. In the best of times very few of us go out of our way to do something that is both complex and unclear.[143]

In fact the job of Principal in Voluntary Secondary Schools is characterised as being one of frequent interruption where the Principal must approve even the most mundane matters.[144] It is understandable that working in such a stressful way the Principal would not have the time, regardless of inclination, to have a 'hands-on' approach to curriculum development. The Report on the National Education Convention pointed out that instructional leadership is the most neglected aspect of the Principal's work

> Pressure of time, with the urgent taking precedence over the important, and insufficient back-up support services, were cited as the main reason for this neglect.[145]

Furthermore, this pressure of time can contribute to a lack of enthusiasm to engage in change. When the day to day tasks are so all-consuming it can happen that curriculum innovation is perceived as being too much trouble, yet another burden in an already overloaded job.

> 'Those in managerial positions will sense that the change will involve them in a lot of conflict, bother and hard work. This they may dread, especially if they feel hard-pressed already.'[146]

The role of the Co-ordinator and team

In Saint Anne's it was not necessary for the Principal to target, persuade or cajole members of staff to become involved in the programme. This was in marked contrast to the situation in other schools. In Saint Anne's there were three teachers actively committed to the programme from the beginning. In the other schools the Principal exercised 'expert' power and 'personal' power when trying to find personnel.

> Expert power and personal power ... allow you to influence people by persuasion and example. People do as you ask, not because of possible punishment or because of your title, but because they respect you,

> understand and agree with you, or because they believe in what you are trying to do even if they don't understand it.[147]

The Saint Anne's team recognised the need to collaborate and discuss what was happening in class. However as they were not timetabled together at any time they found a mutually suitable time to meet each week. As the year progressed, it was not always possible to have this meeting due to work pressures. A lack of time for meetings was also an issue in previous attempts at curricular innovation as has been described in Chapter Three.

One of the results of the growing infrequency of meetings was a lack of co-ordination of the homework assignments given to the class. One of the students in the LCVP class commented directly on this while several mentioned the workload[148]. If the teachers had collaborated more this might not have been such an issue for the students. The two teachers working together in School D did have preparation time in addition to being timetabled together for the class. They put a lot of effort into this aspect and felt it paid off.

> New meanings, new behaviours, new skills and new beliefs depend significantly on whether teachers are working as isolated individuals or are exchanging ideas, support, and positive feelings about their work. The quality of working relationships among teachers is strongly related to implementation.[149]

The teaching style required for teaching the Link Modules is very different to that pertaining in a traditional exam-focussed class. For many activities the teacher is facilitating rather than directing proceedings.

> ...implementation actually comprises a change in the *role relationship* between teachers and students. [150]

The teachers in School D commented on this aspect also. They felt that the relationship with the LCVP students was different in nature to that with other classes.

In School A the co-ordinator more or less had sole responsibility for the programme. This, in addition to lack of time, seemed to produce a feeling of isolation and frustration in the co-ordinator. It seemed that the combination of lack of practical support in organisational matters together with lack of interest from colleagues was wearing her down. The balkanisation and burnout of passionate reform-minded teachers has previously been noted.[151] This is an issue mentioned by the Development Officer also. No matter how enthusiastic or committed the co-ordinator and/or team there will be difficulty with the continuation of the programme unless other teachers are willing to become involved. This was an issue that previously caused difficulty with curricular innovation in Saint Anne's. It will undoubtedly be significant in the continuation of LCVP in the school. Other teachers need to become involved or the initial enthusiasm of the participating teachers could be transformed into the endurance of a life sentence. The general lack of interest among other teachers poses a problem here. This indifference amongst other teachers was evident to a greater or lesser degree in all the schools surveyed.

Involvement of other teachers

Other teachers will not get involved where they already feel overworked even if they are convinced of the value of the proposal. This point about the work involved was mentioned in School D and may explain why in all the schools there was evidence that the vast majority of staff remained uninvolved in and unaffected by the programme. Furthermore not all teachers wish to depart from traditional practices and change to a more collaborative style.

> While teachers may plan and consult, and perhaps even connive and conspire, within their different territorial groups - in their subject departments or their divisions - they rarely co-operate on issues which threaten their classroom autonomy and which open up their practice to intrusive inspection. Materials may be shared and discussed, tricks may be traded, but even within the most closely knit departmental group the

autonomy of the teacher's classroom judgement usually remains sacrosanct.[152]

The cellular organization of schools means that most teachers spend the vast majority of their time separate from their colleagues. It is possible that many prefer it so and are not interested in involving themselves in lesser status non-academic subjects. This would be particularly true of a school like Saint Anne's with its academic tradition where the status of the teacher is bound up with the status of the subject they teach.

> The groups most likely to be marginalised, to receive less staffing and resources and to have lower levels of worth and recognition bestowed on them, are the teachers of lower-status, non-academic subjects.[153]

This lack of respect for the 'lower-status, non-academic subjects' might also explain the isolation and time constraints faced by the Co-ordinator in School A.

Such an attitude among teachers does not necessarily mean that they are mistaken in their approach. They are dealing with the current reality as they perceive it and this must be respected. It limits the scope and possibility of the programme if it is seen simply as something that a few teachers do that doesn't affect anyone else – a 'bolt-on' to the Leaving Certificate as described by the Development Officer.

> …the role of enthusiasts has been overestimated, and the value of resistors has been missed. Enthusiasts can be helpful to be sure, but not if in the mid to long run they increase the gap between themselves as small isolated groups of reformers, and the larger number of organizational members; and not if they turn out to be wrong because their ideas have not been subjected to critical scrutiny by nay-sayers who have a different point of view. [154]

Students

When the students doing the programme were interviewed it emerged that despite efforts to convey information by the school the students were still unclear about what exactly the course content was. They had received the message that it was something that gave them an advantage over their peers but they were unclear on what kind of work they would be doing.

Students who were not involved in the programme had little knowledge or interest in it.

> ...a certain percentage of innovations adopted in schools are reacted to with indifference by students, simply because *the changes in fact do not make a difference to them.* [155]

Some students who did not do the programme claimed that they didn't get a place. This implies some mismatch between teachers' and pupils' perceptions as the former maintain that all students who indicated an interest eventually got a place. In general teachers should be aware that their actions and decisions may be misconstrued by students who have not been involved in the consultation process.

As an illustration of this point some of this group of students indicated a certain resentment with the procedure adopted i.e. only informing students after they had made their subject choice. Teachers saw this as a way to simplify the process administratively but students perceived it as a deliberate exclusion. Some comments made in the questionnaire reflect this alienation.

> People should be told about it as it is not fair that some people should do something and not others, as that is favouritism.
> I think everyone should do it or be given a chance to do it. [156]

This was a completely unforeseen outcome. Perhaps students in Saint Anne's feel particularly sensitive about this as places in classes at both Junior and Senior Cycle are justified on the basis of exam results.

> Those responsible for innovations would be well advised to consider explicitly how innovations will be *introduced* to students and how students reactions will be obtained at that point and periodically *throughout implementation.* [157]

A selective process can also cause difficulty with other staff, particularly if this process impinges on their classes, as the Co-ordinator in School D discovered.

Students in Saint Anne's involved in the programme generally express satisfaction with it. Thus far they feel it is beneficial to them. They refer to an increased confidence in their capacity to deal with adults in interviews, telephone calls etc. More than 25% of these students have been elected as prefects by their peers. Does this indicate that LCVP has developed these skills or does a programme such as LCVP attract a certain kind of student? This is difficult to answer, as such skills are hard to assess. However, teachers in other schools make similar points about the advantages of LCVP for their students

Conclusion

When implementing curricular change certain sources of support for teachers have been identified and then classified in order of their importance as perceived by school principals.[158] These supportswere ranked as follows:

- The Principal
- Short inservice courses
- Staff Departmental meetings
- Advice of Inspectorate
- Educational Journals
- Curriculum materials from external sources
- Teacher release for curriculum planning
- Inter-school meetings
- Teacher release to study at third level institutions.

Some of these factors were influential in the introduction and implementation of LCVP to the schools surveyed in this research. In all the schools the Principal played a key role in the introductory stages. However there seemed to be a lack of involvement by them once the programme was introduced. This tendency to view curricular change as a one-off 'event' rather than an ongoing process[159] can undermine rather than support the teachers involved.

Another aspect of the LCVP that all Co-ordinators mentioned appreciatively was the support provided by the LCVP Office. The Office provided inservice courses on

various aspects of the programme. These courses were very useful and allowed teachers to meet with colleagues from other schools and exchange ideas. The Development Officers organised and distributed Curriculum materials, provided advice and were available for in-school meetings to address teachers and parents. Conversely, meetings of teachers within the school were arranged informally if at all and teacher release to study at third level institutions did not apply to this initiative.

Constraints identified and ranked by principals in order of their importance in the same survey were[160]:

- teacher-pupil ratio
- The examination system
- Lack of time to implement innovations
- Lack of inservice education and training
- Financial reasons
- Lack of resources, facilities, materials
- Rules and programmes for schools
- Teachers' lack of knowledge or skills
- Organisational arrangements – school structure
- Lack of commitment of teachers
- Lack of support from parents
- School management.

Many of these were not an issue in this particular innovation. Factors that were significant included the examination culture, lack of time, lack of commitment from colleagues and a lack of positive reinforcement from school management after the initial stages. These issues were more or less evident in all the schools surveyed.

Taking the particular experience in Saint Anne's over this first year it is clear that the school does enjoy certain advantages. There is a core group of motivated teachers. They have supportive management, ensuring satisfactory timetabling and adequate resources. As a result the experience of LCVP students thus far has been generally positive. School D (the school that is at the same stage of implementation as Saint Anne's) has similar advantages. The main differences between the two schools are:

- The academic culture is more pronounced in Saint Anne's.

- The Principal of School D has been much more involved in the whole process than the Principal of Saint Anne's.

Overall, the impact of the LCVP in Saint Anne's has been positive. The support from external agencies, particularly the LCVP Office, has been very good. The inservice organised was beneficial for both the Principal and the participating teachers. The introduction of the LCVP illustrated the importance of the support of the Principal in such an exercise. Its introduction also resulted in the teachers involved reflecting on their interaction with students both inside and outside the classroom. The teaching style appropriate for LCVP activities is very different to the traditional 'chalk and talk'. In addition the LCVP has increased teachers' awareness of how decisions made by them are perceived by the students. As this research has shown, decisions seen in one light by teachers were viewed very differently by students. Finally, the introduction of the programme has, in general, been a positive experience for the students involved.

Both Saint Anne's and School D face similar challenges with the development of the programme, some of which have occurred in its development in the other schools. Assuming that management continues to actively support the programme, the major challenge will be overcoming the indifference of colleagues to the innovation and involving a greater number of them in the programme. An innovation 'cannot be assimilated unless its *meaning* is shared'[161]. Saint Anne's, in particular, will face an ongoing battle in convincing all members of the school community (teachers, students and parents) of the value of this non-academic programme, given the academic emphasis of its curriculum.

One can make some general observations as a result of this research that may be of interest to other schools considering implementing a similar programme.

- Firstly, the support of management is crucial. This support must be ongoing. It should translate into practical measures such as an adequate provision of time and resources. Adequate time is, perhaps, the most important resource and the most significant expression of support that management can give. Without it, those involved in the delivery of the programme face great difficulty.

- Secondly, a further insight from this research on the LCVP is that decisions that are made about the organisation of the programme and the way in which these decisions are made have an impact on the programme of which one should be conscious. Such decisions can have the effect of confirming or dispelling prejudice about the programme among teachers and students. Restricting LCVP to students of Business subjects can have the effect of sidelining it in the minds of students and reinforcing the erroneous impression that it is only of interest to a minority of students.

- Finally, those implementing such a programme should have an awareness of the culture of the school in which they work. Without at least the acceptance of others, such a programme will be marginalised and its long-term survival will be in jeopardy.

In conclusion, the research reported in this dissertation, identified the issues that arise in the implementation of LCVP in a variety of schools. Of necessity only a small number of schools have been studied. However, it is hoped and believed that the results can be generalised to all schools dealing with curriculum change, showing the stresses they may face and guiding the responses they may make. It must be remembered that change is not impossible but it is slow to happen. It is a journey whose final destination is uncertain. This uncertainty should not detract from the validity of the process. Educational Change is described as a paradox needing to be both fast and slow and narrow and broad.[162] When dealing with such a paradox participants need to have a tolerance for uncertainty allied with a determination to proceed.

Appendix One

Questionnaire for Co-ordinators

1. How did the programme first come to the attention of the school?
2. When did you first offer the programme?
3. How many students did the Dept. sanction for this first group?
4. Did all eligible students get a place? If not, how did you select the students?
5. Did all students who started, finish? If not what were their reasons for dropping out?
6. In your school do students perceive it as aimed at weaker students only?
7. How did you inform parents / students / staff about this new program? Have you changed the way you do this since the program started.
8. Did timetabling the Link Modules represent a problem and if so, how was it overcome?
9. How was the Co-Ordinator selected?
10. Was it difficult to get staff involved in teaching the programme? If so how did you overcome this difficulty?
11. Are the same teachers involved now as were in the beginning? If not, why not?
12. How was the start-up money spent?
13. How do you develop inter-disciplinary links? Is this aspect very difficult?
14. How many visiting speakers do you have each year?
15. How many outside visits did you have?
16. How is Work Experience organized?
17. How much in-service did you have and did you find it helpful?
18. Do you have a school-business link? With who? Was it difficult to organize?
19. Do you think the L.C.V.P. is valuable for students? Why?
20. What has been the most difficult aspect of the programme for your school?

Appendix Two

Questions for Development Officer Wed 12th May 1999

Based on your experience as a member of the LCVP Support Team what is your opinion on the following issues:

Concerns / worries of new schools

1. When preparing induction meetings for new schools what issues do you anticipate arising?

2. How is LCVP perceived in the school? Is there a difference in this perception between the different groups e.g. teachers, students, parents?

3. Has the recognition of the Links Modules by the Universities enhanced the prestige of the programme?

4. Is the recognition for points being used as a selling point for the programme now?

Operational Issues

1. In new schools who has been the key figure in promoting/introducing the programme?

2. How are parents / students / staff informed about this new program?

3. Does timetabling the Link Modules represent a problem and if so, how is it overcome?

4. How is the Co-Ordinator selected?

5. Is it difficult to get staff interested in the programme? If so how do schools overcome this difficulty?

6. How is the start-up money spent?

Support for schools

1. What has been the most difficult aspect of the programme for most schools?

2. What is the feedback from in-service? Do participants find it helpful?

3. In your opinion, can a teacher with no Business background successfully teach the programme?

4. How many schools who attend an initial briefing / workshop on LCVP choose not to provide the programme? What would be the reasons for this decision?

Appendix Three

Questionnaire toFourth Year Students May 1998

I would like to get some information at this point on your attitude and expectations of the Leaving Certificate Programme.

1. There are, in fact, three Leaving Cert Programmes, traditional, LCVP and LCA. What is the difference between these three programmes, in your opinion?

2. What is your knowledge of LCVP in particular?

3. How did you learn the information given in your answer to question 2?

4. Were you invited to the Information Evening on the LCVP?   Yes   No

5. Did you attend?   Why/Why not?

6. Have you applied for the LCVP class next year?   Yes   No

7. What factors influenced your decision?

8. If you answered yes to question 6:

    (a) What is the main thing you hope to achieve from the programme?

    (b) Do you have any worries/reservations about participating in the programme?

Appendix Four

Career Interview

1. What career are you investigating?

2. Why did you choose this one?

3. What do you know about it (entry conditions, training required, job prospects, etc)

4. Have you interviewed someone working in this area?

5. What information did you learn from this?

6. Have you managed to organise work shadowing? Why / Why not?

7. What problems did you encounter during this investigation?

3. What attempts did you make to solve them?

LCVP itself

1. Can you remember why you decided to do the LCVP initially?

2. Now that you have completed one year of the programme is it as you expected or different?

3. In your opinion is it worthwhile? Why / Why not?

Appendix Five

Questions for 5th year students not involved in the LCVP

1. What are the aims of LCVP?

2. What extra subjects do LCVP students do?

3. What kind of exam do they do in these subjects and when do they do these exams?

4. Are these subjects eligible for points at Third Level? If so, what kind of points?

5. What activities take place in the LCVP class?

6. Is there a difference between the Leaving Cert. you will get and the Leaving Cert. the LCVP students will get?

7. If you had the correct subject combinations to do the LCVP why did you decide not to apply for a place in the class?

8. Would you advise incoming 5th year students to take LCVP or not? (Please give reasons)

9. Any other comment?

Appendix Six

Religious and Educational Philosophy/Ethos

As a Catholic School, Saint Anne's offers a Christian environment to families who wish their daughters to be educated in an atmosphere of faith. From this faith in a humanity made sacred by the Incarnation of Jesus, springs a profound reverence for the worthiness of every human person. Beginning with respect and reverence for one's own person, as a created gift from God, the student is helped to build a healthy self-esteem in gratitude for all the gifts of soul, mind and body. The personality is helped to develop in security and humility and so is liberated from the selfishness that engenders arrogance and ruthless ambition.

This School environment, worthy of human beings, produces a concern for the welfare and good of others. This concern reflects itself officially in a strict discipline, exact time-keeping and regular organised study. The security created by this regularity always allows room for the individual to develop independence and self control. When the student has difficulty with the system she is given attentive hearing and so learns the rationale of school discipline. This understanding helps towards strength of character through an internalising self-discipline.

The spirit of reverence for beauty and order is mirrored in the cleanliness of the School and its well-maintained buildings. A high standard of personal grooming comes naturally to students who have learnt, early on, the lesson of self-respect. Uniform, too, helps avoid that competition in dress so often the subject of manipulation by a consumer society.

Courtesy, politeness and graciousness towards everybody are outward signs of Christianity-in-action and are qualities cultivated as desirable in the Students. The School climate therefore reflects a positive acceptance of everyone. It is a place where Students learn to appreciate human differences and inadequacies. The maturity involves facing the pain of conflict, of diverging opinion and of accepting the burden of reality. The School atmosphere of friendship and helpfulness promotes all of this growth towards authenticity. Freedom to express one's views knowing they will be respected is the foundation for responsible decisive moral adulthood. The Student learns progressively how to assume a sensitive conscience towards the oppressed of our society and world. This openness to others, the attentiveness to justice, the expectancy of joy and affection makes the School a happy place to be in.

The School has distinguished itself in the past by its standards of excellence; academic, athletic and cultural. A spirit of industrious hard work is characteristic and the ensuing challenge and lively atmosphere promotes intellectual and creative initiative and competence. Tradition has established a reputation for reliability in employment which favourably disposes employers and greatly benefit today's students.

The Principal and teaching staff play a central role in realising the Christian philosophy which led to the foundation of Saint Anne's School. By their Christian

witness they impart a distinctive character to the school. The influence of the teacher extends much beyond his/her subject area. They are encouraged to reflect the Christian philosophy of the School in their professional relationships with each other and with all members of the school community.

Parents are the primary educators of their children. The school assists them in this responsibility. In choosing to send their child to Saint Anne's School. Parents subscribe to its Christian philosophy. Parental involvement is required if the School is to achieve its aims. Management and Principal ensure that the school creates and maintains channels of communication, information and consultation with the parents of all pupils. In turn, parents are encouraged to give the School their trust and co-operation. All parents are members of the Home School Association which meets each month and has its own constitution.

This is a statement of the Philosophy which inspired the Trustees to establish Saint Anne's School. It is also a declaration of the Christian orientation of its curriculum.

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