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Curriculum Innovation in a Post Primary School:

A Case Study of the LCVP

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By

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Declaration

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

Signed:_____ **Date:**_____

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Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to examine two interrelated themes. Firstly I aim to investigate the process of curricular innovation; in this case the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (referred to as LCVP in the rest of this dissertation) in a newly constituted school. Secondly in the light of findings from this investigation I will assess the conditions deemed necessary for the successful implementation of educational innovations. This study explores the meanings of aspects of the implementation process for those involved in the process of implementing curriculum change and how they relate to and are influenced by their particular setting and by internal and external factors. Focusing on the implementation process enables us to study the innovation as a dependent variable and allows examination of strategies and other determinants of change as they affect the degree of implementation in various settings. The central focus of this study is not whether the programme was implemented but how the programme was implemented.

The school under investigation is a 4 year old community school. Three years ago the LCVP was introduced in the hope that it could benefit students for whom the established Leaving Certificate (LC) was not an appropriate programme. In this regard I aim to examine the Department of Education and Science' rationale for the LCVP and assess its suitability for the students in the school, whilst also reviewing the reported benefits of the programme.

Three years after its initial implementation it has been decided to discontinue the LCVP in the school. The main focus of this dissertation is to review the experience of the LCVP in the school in relation to the influences on the process of implementation, whilst also exploring the reasons for the schools decision to discontinue the programme. Did the LCVP deliever its anticipated aims in the school? If not, why not? The teachers, students and wider community are affected

by any curricular developments but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the perceptions of all three parties so the current research will confine itself to the perceptions of the teachers. Teachers' perceptions are fundamental to successful change. In their research both Fullan and Hargreaves conclude that change only

> takes place when members of a school community recognise...a need to change...and provided with shared process...establish a shared language for...on going communication, research and professional interaction that incorporates all members ...to support the process of change,
>
> (Fullan and Hargreaves ,1996:93).

From my investigations I hope to identify possibilities for the fruitful running of an innovation such as the LCVP in the future of the school, with recommendations for its successful implementation and development.

In Chapter One I will provide a profile of the school itself. This will consist of a brief history and background of the school and the socio-economic area in which the school is placed. I believe this is important because the school has changed from being a secondary school to being a community school. In this transition the management structure was changed and the ethos and beliefs held dearly by staff were challenged. In addition, the catchment area of the school altered, as did the calibre of students it served. These changes influenced the school's decision to introduce the LCVP. In the later part of the chapter I will give an account of the introduction and early experience of the LCVP in the school, illuminating its suitability and possible shortcomings.

Chapter Two will be composed of a literature review. It will consist of two sections. The first part, (Section A) will provide a critical analysis of the LCVP. I will examine its rationale, structure and assessment criteria and will contrast it with another senior cycle option, the established LC. The teaching and learning methodologies encouraged will also be outlined and the reported benefits of such a rationale will be considered. In the second section of the literature review (Section B) I will look at the implementation of educational change, highlighting

aspects which the literature recommends for successful implementation. I will focus on three relevant themes in this investigation:

a) The role of school leadership in the form of the Principal.
b) The role of the teacher.
c) The role of school culture.

Chapter Three gives an account of the methodology chosen for the study. The objectives of the study are briefly outlined, followed by a discussion of the research methods used. This dissertation combines elements of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study will use a questionnaire to examine the implementation of policy change at school level. This school was chosen on the basis that teaching there provided the researcher with ease of access during school hours. Personal contact for the research was established with the LCVP co-ordinator and a number of teachers who had LCVP students in their classes. Principals, coordinators and teachers have different perceptions due to their different roles in the implementation process. However the main focus of the study will be on the perceptions of the teachers. The co-ordinator will be surveyed in order to supplement the information provided by teachers on their questionnaires and in order to give a broader view of the implementation process in the school. The results of the finding from the questionnaires will provide the structure for the focus group discussion. This will be used to investigate the teachers' perceptions of issues of implementation and also to establish whether the rationale for the LCVP as set out by the Department of Education and Science was reflected in the school.

Chapter Four presents the results of the study and provides a preliminary analysis of these. Comments made by teachers are included. Preliminary analysis is largely descriptive and presents the findings in tabular and graphic form for clarity where possible. Further cross curricular analysis shows the merging patterns and issues arising from the responses of the teachers. Analysis is divided into perceptions of the national implementation process and perceptions of the implementation process at school level. Because the findings are extensive and are of particular importance to policy decisions that may need to be taken in the

school, they are presented in some detail. A large amount of graphical data in relation to this section also appears in the Appendices.

Chapter Five analyses and reviews the findings emerging from the study in relation to the implementation process in general and specifically, to the implementation process involved in school based programmes such as LCVP.

Chapter Six presents conclusions drawn from the primary research with reference to the literature and outlines recommendations in the context of school leadership and culture. Reflection on the issues emerging facilitates the suggestion of scope for future work in this area at a time when the implementation of new programmes is at the forefront of educational reform.

Chapter One

Historical Profile of the School

The school under investigation is a post primary all girls community school, located in a suburban town near Dublin. The catchment area caters for children from the local parishes. Local primary schools have also established links as feeder schools with the school over the years.

The community school opened in September 1999, as a result of the closure of a convent school on the other side of the town. This previous school was established in 1955 as a girl's boarding school with 7 pupils. The 60's and 70's saw the school expand and open as a day school to accommodate the growing population in the nearby town. By the mid 80's the numbers coming from the town increased dramatically and the school found itself under great pressure. It quickly became overcrowded and it was thus necessary to plan for a new school. The arrival of the 1990's brought the question of the new school to a head. After much debate it was decided that a new school building would be built on another, larger site in the town. Many years of negotiations took place, culminating in the commencement of the building of the new school in August 1998. The opening enrolment for the new community school was 600 and in 2003/2004 that number now stands at 741 with a staff of 52. The social class mix in the new school is very different from the old school. While the school traditionally served middle class students from the locality it now serves all classes, in addition to a growing number of religions and cultures.

By the early 1990's, extensive social and economic change in the schools catchment area had begun to alter further the profile of the students enrolling in the school. With growing numbers, especially because of increased relocation from city suburbs, a growing satellite town and a changing society, the challenges for the school also began to intensify. In order to address some of these

challenges it was decided to offer the LCVP to senior students. The issue of meeting the needs of a greater variety of students' abilities, in addition to the number of students not completing sixth year or doing very badly in the established LC, reaffirmed the decision to offer LCVP. The programme aimed to prepare students for adult life by ensuring they were educated in the broadest sense with an ability to cope and thrive in an environment of change (DES, 1999). Such an aim seemed very suitable for the student cohort in the school.

The School and its Surrounding Area

The town has a population of between 17,000 – 19,000. There is a social mix of housing with two thirds of the houses being built by the private sector and one third by the local authority, (C.S.O., 2002). The town has one local shopping centre that is becoming increasingly run down. Open spaces that exist in the town have either been recently deemed viable for development or tend to be poorly maintained with few amenities.

As a result of a growing population of 12 – 17 year olds, there are a number of challenges facing the school internally and externally. The changing social class composition and the diverse aspirations of students and their parents are placing increasing pressure on the school and its structures. The Chamber of Commerce for the town collected statistical information in June of 1998. Information emerging from this report highlighted the increase in the level of disadvantage in the town, especially because of the houses been built by the local authorities. Inevitably this was to have an effect on the new community school and its student intake. Students' attitudes and lifestyles and their perceptions on life after school and work are also playing a more influential role than in the past. The multi-cultural society and increasing number of non-nationals in the school also means that social structures and curricular innovations are going to have to be adopted to address the needs of a much more diverse ability student grouping. Given the external and internal changing landscape of the school, learning support, resource teachers, grants and more guidance counselling hours have been granted.

The LCVP in the School

One of the school's responses to such changes in both the internal and external environment has been to adopt the LCVP at senior cycle. In September 2001, the LCVP. was introduced into the school in the hope that it could provide for some of the students who were ill matched to the established LC, whilst also trying to get as many students as possible to actually complete their senior cycle. This programme was offered to students in the school after little staff involvement. There was no discussion or information about the programme forwarded, it was just announced at a staff meeting that it would be offered in the following academic year. A co-ordinator had already been selected and teachers were directed to him if they had any further questions on this programme. Teachers were not aware at this stage who would be involved in teaching the programme. At this stage the school had also applied to the DES to introduce the programme. The co-ordinator had attended a briefing session the previous February.

Although the programme was introduced in September 2001, it was not until August 2001, when timetables were sent to teachers, that they were aware whether they would be involved in the programme or not. Therefore teachers who were involved in the LCVP were teachers whose timetables stated such rather than those who expressed an interest in teaching this new initiative. Research by Sarason (1990) strongly recommends that teachers should be involved in any change at school level because "teachers can block change if they don't understand the reason for it and or are given no involvement in the decision making process", (Sarason, 1990:89).

In addition to the teachers having never met collectively indirect streaming has caused difficulties between the student cohort and the LCVP teachers. As such the students who opted to complete the programme were of lower academic ability. Drudy (1993) comments in her research on how this can cause the emergence of anti school behaviour among students. She highlights that "where friendship bonds are strong there is little motivation for the students to work hard because they fear if they outdo each other they will be moved to a different class", (1993:251). On the other hand mixed ability grouping as advocated in the rest of the school meant there was more interaction between classes and groups of

students, and less stereotyping about students who may be in lower streams. Whilst labelling and stereotyping are common human responses in complex social situations Lynch believes that such "can limit the teacher's expectations of their pupils, putting a strain on relationships", (Lynch, 1999:58) and this seems to have been the case in this instance.

With regard to discipline among the LCVP students they have higher numbers of disciplinary complaints against them compared with any other class at senior level. However Smyth (1999:58) reports that "bad behaviour can occur in lower streams because of pupil's recognition of their place in the scheme of things, at the bottom". In contrast mixed ability grouping as practiced among the rest of the senior students illustrates a high commitment to the rules and norms of the school, as reported by Lynch, (1993). Teachers are now reluctant to teach LCVP in its present state in the school. The students are hard to reach and relationships of a productive kind are hard to maintain. The trends experienced above have generally been repeated with the LCVP group that has followed. As a result the programme is not as strongly supported by management or staff as it was initially.

To date the LCVP is not running at its full strength, numbers applying are falling and teachers are increasingly unwilling to get involved. As it stands the programme will not be offered in the school next year.

Summary

This chapter sought to locate the school in the context of its locality. The history of the school was briefly outlined, highlighting how a change in the management structure of the school from secondary to community was to impact on the life of both teachers and students, whilst also changing the ethos. One of the new initiatives that was undertaken and put in place in September 2001 was the LCVP. It sought to make senior cycle education as attractive and relevant as possible to a now wider cohort of students. The LCVP as it stands in the school was then outlined.

Chapter Two

The LCVP and the Introduction of Educational Change: A Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will be divided into two sections. Section A will put the LCVP in context of overall senior cycle developments, examining aspects such as the rationale, assessment, the teaching and learning methodologies advocated and the reported benefits of the programme. Section B will examine current research literature on the implementation of educational change, particularly with regard to the adoption and implementation of curricular innovations, focusing on such at school level. A number of factors relevant to this research study will be investigated, including what makes implementation successful in schools, given the challenges that may arise. In addition the kinds of school cultures conducive to change and the role of the teacher and school leadership (school Principal) in the change process will be examined.

Section A: The LCVP in the context of Senior Cycle Change

Senior Cycle developments have tried to achieve a balance between the retention of the best elements of existing programmes with an increased emphasis on vocational dimensions and more varied assessment methods whilst also retaining the unifying idea that each results in a LC, (N.C.C.A., 2002:41). Such developments are therefore addressing the fundamental aim of education, which, according to the Department of Education is to:

> serve individual, social and economic well being…by providing a stimulating range of programmes suited to their abilities, aptitudes and interests…allowing students to develop to their full potential in a rapidly changing society,
> (Dept. of Education, 1995: 50)

As a result of such developments, the senior cycle at post primary now comprises a two or three year programme. The restructuring has involved four main elements:

- Transition Year as an option for all second level schools.

- Revision of the established LC programme. At present the N.C.C.A. is reviewing and updating all syllabi on a phased basis.
- The introduction of the LC Applied, which was introduced on a phased basis from 1995.
- The development and expansion of the LCVP combining the academic benefits of the established LC with a strong focus on the World of Work, ICT, Enterprise and languages.

According to the DES the LCVP was "introduced in response to the changing needs of Ireland's education system and the changing work and business environment" (DES, 1997:3). The focus of the programme is on students taking greater responsibility for their own learning, becoming more innovative, problem solving and enterprising, communicating well, working in teams and with adults in business and the community, on accessing and using technology and investigating career options, (DES, 1999:6).

> The LCVP subscribes to an additional approach which emphasises active learning, cross curricular and interdisciplinary activities, and the acquisition of core skills with the ultimate aim of developing autonomous, adaptable life long learners,
>
> (DES, 1999: 4).

By and large, the structure of senior cycle initiatives are, "ring fenced", (DES, 1999:11). Students cannot easily move between them or mix and match elements of these programmes. However because the same subject syllabii are undertaken within the parameters set by permitted vocational subject groupings between the established LC and the LCVP, both programmes are an exception to this. In light of the changing demands of society and students needs, the N.C.C.A. have reported that the current provision of subjects in the established LC reflects a decided bias in favour of certain forms of knowledge and understanding mainly the linguistic and logical mathematical, (N.C.C.A., 1994). The N.C.C.A. (2002:13) advocates that, "the established Leaving Certificate…offers students the potential for specialisation towards a particular career orientation whilst using their exam for purposes of selection into further and higher education". It is in this regard that despite the high profile of the established LC that questions arose regarding the educational quality of this programme in relation to:

- The potential lack of breath and balance in the programme.

- The quality of provision for those students taking subjects at ordinary level and its relationship to patterns of underachievement at this level.
- The difficulty experienced by those with special educational needs in accessing the programme and its inflexibility in meeting their needs.
- The extent to which the selection function results in teachers teaching to the test rather than to the curriculum through use of traditional teaching and learning. practices with an over emphasis on the use of textbooks and sample examination papers.
- The extent to which the selection function results in students choosing subjects perceived as 'easier' and therefore likely to yield a higher points gain for selection.
- The marginalisation of non-exam subjects.

In order to try and address some of these concerns the LCVP requires that students, while taking the established LC subjects, also take 2 subjects from a vocational list of 13 subjects (See Appendix IV). They also complete 2 Link Modules, (Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education). The Link Modules focus on the key skills believed to be valuable in the world of work and are almost entirely activity based. After assessment the results for these modules can be recorded and generated into points for third level entry. The Link Modules have proven to be very successful and have become the focal point of the programme in recent years. (For a Curriculum Comparison between the established LC and the LCVP see Appendix V)

Criticism of the established LC is that it's too academic, with insufficient attention given to students of differing abilities, attitudes and learning styles. The limited range of assessment approaches and pedagogical methods in use has also proven to be problematic. While the LCVP has served to address a number of these issues we must realise that many of the criticisms associated with the established LC still apply to the LCVP because they share the same subject syllabi and assessment arrangements. In response to this the N.C.C.A. (at its conference at Dublin castle in October 2003) suggested the option of combining the established LC and the LCVP, in order to combine the best elements of both programmes. As Colvin & Ross (1991) highlight such "has the power to transform teaching from the transmission of isolated,

fragmented information to the facilitation of pupil's construction of meaningful interrelated understandings" (1991:107).

The DES (1999:5), report that "by the linking of LC subjects into vocational groupings such as in the LCVP", teaching and learning are enhanced. Teachers are always being encouraged to use active and experience-based approaches in the classroom and the Evaluation of the LCVP (1997) reported that the Link Modules impacted on teaching methodologies. In many cases they fostered innovative approaches with the use of group work, report writing, the use of I.T. and video equipment, brainstorming, visits and visitors, role play and projects across the curriculum, (DES 1997:19). They generally encourage the teacher to take on more of a facilitator's role in assisting learners while using active teaching and learning methodologies

In relation to the students Granville (2002) highlights that one form of learning that has dominated most schools is concerned with the learning of knowledge content, a major characteristic of the established LC. However another form of learning is learning how to do things, this is work related learning and is a part of LCVP Link Modules. The Link Modules are designed to give students greater ownership of their own learning, to take responsibility for their own learning and to evaluate their actions, therefore promoting skills and qualities of self reliance, innovation and enterprise. Team work among students is encouraged because it's believed students have a lot to learn from each other and the community beyond knowledge based texts, (N.C.C.A., 2002:19). Experiences such as work placement, career investigation, mini-enterprise, business and community visits, which are an integral part of the programme also nurture skills in the areas of ICT and project management. The N.C.C.A. (2002:16) highlight how "vocational relevance is enhanced by putting in place opportunities for students to plan, organize and engage in active learning experiences inside and outside the classroom". As a result of the Link Modules students are reported to have experienced more activity based learning and teamwork than students of the established L.C. (DES 1997:11).

The N.C.C.A. pinpoint the importance of assessment in the education process and advocates its importance in the process of learning, (N.C.C.A., 2002:42). It is

believed that formative types of assessment play a crucial role in progressing learning and in developing effective learners. However summative assessment in Ireland is intrinsic to senior cycle education, where the results of such assessment convert into certification, qualifications, and a passport to higher education and become an important factor in the future work and life prospects of learners, (N.C.C.A.: 2002). The results of such assessment act as a reference point for agencies involved in employment and training. In relation to this type of assessment at senior cycle, a number of issues have been raised, such as:

- The failure of assessment and certificate to reflect adequately the diverse purposes of curricula, due mainly to the undue emphasis on the selection purposes of the certificate and its related techniques of assessment (N.C.C.A., 1994).
- The limited range of assessment modes and components used.
- Inadequate attention to the critical role of formative assessment in the teaching and learning process.

Performance in terminal exams alone is a narrow basis on which to assess the talents and abilities of learners that will in turn affect the rest of their lives. Whilst it gives an indication of how students can perform over a fairly extensive area of knowledge it can be unfair and Williams (1992) has highlighted this. The N.C.C.A. (2002:42), report that the quality of senior cycle education in Ireland could be improved by, "focusing on how assessment arrangements and the nature of certification can be developed".

The terminal exam in the established LC is the main form of assessment for the majority of students in Ireland. It has a high profile and to a large degree enjoys public confidence and status. However whilst LCVP student's follow the same subject syllabi and are assessed generally in the same way as their peers in the established LC with an external terminal exam, the form of assessment used in relation to the LCVP Link Modules places more emphasis on promoting skills and the processes of life long learning. It is believed that the use of project work, field work, experimental work and historical research are all positive developments which will help young people to achieve greater mastery of the processes of learning. The terminal exam paper at the end of the final year consists of an audio-visual section and

a case study (text given 1 month prior to the exam). The report published by Marino (1999:6) points out that both of these aim to examine the students ability to "elucidate factual information, identify, analyse, link with existing knowledge, propose and evaluate solutions to problems, form opinions". In addition the Link Modules are assessed by written examination (40%) and a portfolio of coursework (60%). (See Appendix VI for breakdown of written and portfolio exams). The portfolio, a self reflective collection of the students work provides powerful learning opportunities and is a welcome and fairer form of assessment than the present single terminal exam. It involves students and teachers in a process of formative assessment whereby the students work is enhanced through evaluative feedback and reflection. It reduces the element of chance. Such is advocated by a number of educationalists including Williams, (1992). However it has been reported that one of the dangers of such assessment is that the learning experiences of the students can become fragmented and over specialised and this is something of which we should beware of.

While developments have been made in the assessment of the LCVP little has changed in the area of assessment within the established LC to date. External terminal exams predominate. The reluctance to introduce new assessment components and arrangements at this level is understandable because the established LC enjoys public confidence in terms of standards, status ands currency. The perceived objectivity of assessment arrangements is also seen as a major strength of the established LC. Yet the *Commission on the Points system: Final Report and Recommendations* (1999) suggests that little will change in the area of teaching and learning unless the established LC encompasses assessment change. The experience of the use of module completion in the LCVP, assessment of tasks, the use of interviewing and assessment of portfolios is therefore worth noting. According to the N.C.C.A. (2002) the LCVP assessment, in relation to the Link Modules has contributed to a more varied and interesting learning environment for all learners. The only danger of such is that it is perceived as being for the academically less able and possession of such could be perceived as a record of non-achievement.

The reported benefits of the LCVP in relation to other senior cycle options have never been evaluated. However both the N.C.C.A. and the LCVP Support Services have highlighted a number of areas where they believe the LCVP's strengths lie. They

believe the LCVP contributes to preparing students for adult life by ensuring they are educated in the broadest sense with skills that will prove relevant for further education or employment, (DES 2000:11). This is facilitated by promoting "skills and qualities of self-reliance, innovation and enterprise...namely through the Link Modules", (DES, 1999:5).

Employees are increasingly required to be adaptable, multi skilled, good communicators, capable of making decisions whilst being life long learners. The LCVP contributes to promoting these skills more than the established LC mainly because of the presence of the "World of Work Module" which is designed to provide students with an insight into such with opportunities to develop interpersonal, communication and organisational skills. They get an opportunity to gain practical insights into careers through work placement or by focused career investigation. In addition the "Enterprise Module" promotes the development in students of qualities such as initiative, resourcefulness, creativity, self-confidence and tenacity. The enhancement of such skills is the most important outcome of the LCVP programme, (DES, 1997:20). Therefore it is no surprise that employers familiar with the LCVP such a Fergal Quinn see its students as being more employable. It is also believed they will also be in a better position to set up their own businesses, (DES, 2000:10). In support of this the majority of the 1100 students surveyed in the 1997 LCVP evaluation indicated a very positive perception of the benefits of LCVP, especially in relation to employment.

> The outcomes, which they associated most strongly, were...better knowledge of the world of work, better skills for job seeking, and better experience of work skills. Students were of the opinion that they had got to know the demands of workplace and the expectations of employers. In summary they were of the opinion that they would acquire an enhanced LC
>
> (DES, 1997:22)

The Link Modules also present new opportunities for oral presentation and report writing which are both enriching and valuable for students, (DES, 1997:20). However it must be noted that

> Students who completed a problem based experiential course were found to be inferior to traditional route students in terms of academic achievement, factual

> knowledge and basic science. But they were found to be superior in terms of student satisfaction, clinical performance, academic process and behaviour,
> (Granville 2002:11).

In addition the LCVP has substantially raised the general awareness of the application of IT throughout the school curriculum, (DES, 1997:20).

In relation to teaching and learning the LCVP encourages students to apply their learning on a more continuous basis whilst teachers are encouraged to adopt more of a facilitator's role, (N.C.C.A., 2002). According to principals the LCVP has caused a number of positive outcomes. These include

- "The stimulation of professional and in-career development of teachers
- Encouragement of teachers to engage in curriculum development
- Improved co-operation and team work development among teachers
- Improved pupil retention rates and greater interest and motivation in class work
- The introduction of a spirit of enterprise to the school
- The development of an awareness of the value of the links between industry and education",

(DES, 1997:22)

Evaluations of the LCVP to date (DES, 1997; Granville, 1999; Marino, 1999) indicate that the programme has taken root. In particular the Link Modules have become a focal point of the programme and through them much of value in terms of teaching approaches, learning activities and assessment methods has been achieved in the implementation of the programme. The success of the Link Modules in addressing key skills such as those in the areas of ICT, communication, project management and problem solving has given rise to the question, why are the Link Modules not available to all those participating in the LC?

In conclusion, as the N.C.C.A. (2002:9) point out, "it is incumbent on education system, in the interest of learners, to review provision continuously in order to take account of these changes. It's equally incumbent on these systems to take account of new understanding of the process of education itself". The LCVP addresses the needs

of the students for the 21st century whilst encouraging teachers to re-evaluate their roles in the classroom.

> The teacher must shift from the role as purveyor of largely subject specific learning products to being managers of learning environments, as facilitators of learning processes,
>
> (N.C.C.A., 2002:36)

The LCVP encourages the use of critical reflection on the part of the teacher enabling teachers to retain their sharpness. It's widely believed that curriculum and assessment can constrain the quality of teaching and learning. However the LCVP takes into account the students work over the duration of their senior cycle. This is the first ever break away from the isolated terminal LC exam and a milestone in itself for students and teachers alike. In this respect the LCVP has given more flexibility to teachers and students. They are encouraged to be more confident, hopeful, mature and articulate. Leadership qualities are encouraged and in many cases gaps between students and teachers are bridged.

However it is important to emphasise that given that the LCVP largely comprises LC established subjects, many of the criticisms that are regularly visited on the programme can equally be made of the LCVP. This explains why success in implementing certain aspects of the LCVP, for example the cross curricular and inter disciplinary dimensions of the programme - making links between what is learned through the Link Modules and learning in LC subjects - has proved particularly elusive. Furthermore the LCVP has not proved the most accessible for those with special educational needs and for both repeat and external examination candidates. Therefore although progress has been made there is still a long way to go.

Section B: The Implementation of Educational Change

When it comes to implementing educational change in schools, Huberman and Miles (1984) point out that there are no hard and fast rules. Recent changes in senior cycle curricula warrant what Fullan (1991:43) refers to as "second order changes" - changes that go deeper into the structure of organisations and the ways in which people think. This type of change is slow, it "is a process not an event", (Fullan, 1991:49). The introduction, implementation and management of a curricular initiative such as the LCVP have massive implications for the schools involved. The elements involved include new materials, which are tangible and new behaviour, practices, skills and pedagogical styles that are less palpable but more important and difficult to change. Such changes require alterations in both practice in the classroom and in the organisation and culture of the school. Implementation has been defined as, "how the programme looks in operation" (King et al, 1987:7) but Shipman's definition of the term implementation, "to incorporate the innovation into a school" (Shipman et al, 1974:60), is closest to that intended in this study.

Twenty years of research on change in schools has provided a wealth of information on processes that work and do not work. The successful implementation of new programmes to a large extent remains a dilemma. The research literature recognises a number of reasons why many attempts at innovation fail, such as appropriatness to the environment, suitability, a lack of definition and a lack of practice and training in relation to the innovation. In circumstances where change was described as an event, being selected and announced, it was assumed that change would then simply happen. But emphasis should be on designing and adopting good programmes not simply implementing them. According to Fullan (1991:47) the successful implementation of educational change involves three stages, the initiation stage, the implementation stage and the continuation stage. I will briefly explore each one of these in turn.

Initiation is the first stage of implementation and consists of the process that leads up to and includes a decision to proceed with change. It is affected by a number of factors but the three R's, as highlighted by Fullan (1991:51) of relevance, readiness and resources are probably the most noteworthy for this research study. Relevance is important because the innovation must be seen to address a specific need for the school community. To achieve such the LCVP Evaluation (1995:9) recommends that each school should develop a "programme statement" outlining the reasons for participating in the programme, in addition to the schools aims, objectives and expected outcomes of the programme in the school. Is it worth the effort? Does it address an unmet need? Is this need a priority? Are there adequate resources available for the change? Such a shared vision of what the school should look like also provides a driving force for the change, according to Flynn (2002:16). In addition Coolahan (1995:10) highlights another important aspect in that, "implementation is the business of all, the responsibility of all". In order to facilitate this Darling Hammond (1995) stresses the importance of open dialogue because it serves to create a sense of involvement and empowerment in the school. "Teachers can block change, if they don't understand the reason for it and or are given no involvement in the ...process early on", Sarason (1990:89). In support of this Bailey (2000) outlines how imposed change can marginalise teachers because there is no forum to air grievances, concerns, or ask questions. This in turn can make them less willing to work collaboratively therefore decreasing the potential for positive educational change. Teacher involvement is therefore paramount at the initiation stage. At the earliest stage school management should give priority to the development of a team culture amongst the staff. The N.C.C.A. (2002:67) believe that "engagement with the capacity of system structures, schools, teachers and students for change must be the starting point" in order to facilitate "the successful implementation of the programme", (DES 1997:21). Readiness to initiate change concerns the individual school's capacity to adopt a given innovation at that given time, for example, is the change compatible with the culture of the school? Schools must take ownership of innovations and shape them to their students' needs at the time. "We must adapt programmes not adopt them, it's not the case of one size fits all" (Coolahan 1995:21)

The next stage is concerned with the actual *Implementation* of change and usually occurs over the first 2 or 3 years of use. It "involves the first experiences of

attempting to put an idea into practice", (Fullan, 1991:48). Coolahan (1995:9) notes that inadequate attention to this stage can result in problems, unfulfilled goals and unattained proposed changes. Therefore what happens next depends on the strategy and commitment of individual schools. After establishing the schools needs, clarity about goals and objectives must be evident. Once the implementation is satisfactorily underway, evolutionary planning and consistent monitoring must occur, involving students, parents and partners in education. The N.C.C.A. (2002) believes,

> successful implementation of change is achievable through meaningful discussion... through considered planning... through a comprehensive approach to provision for implementation, and by incorporating processes of evaluation from the outset,
>
> (N.C.C.A., 2002:71)

Effective planning and implementation also requires clearly defined management responsibilities and the empowerment of individuals within the school, in addition to both pressure and support, (Law and Glover, 2000:136). "Both top down and bottom up strategies are necessary. What is required is a two-way relationship of pressure, support and continuous negotiation" (Fullan 1991:28). Sustained professional development is also recommended at this stage. The LCVP Evaluation (DES 1997:27) states that, "each school should participate fully in the in-career development and support programmes offered by the LCVP Office". To a degree restructuring is needed, in relation to the provision of time for people to meet and co-ordinate the process. It's vital for schools to prioritise their values. Within our schools collaborative work cultures should be nurtured, helping to reduce the professional isolation of teachers. Fullan (1991:84) points out that "constant communication and joint work provide the continuous pressure and support necessary for getting things done".

Finally *continuation* is an extension of the implementation phase, and aims to sustain a new innovation beyond the first year or two. This third stage depends on whether or not the change becomes built into the structure of the school through "policy... and timetables...or if it disappears by way of a decision to discard or through attrition", (Fullan 1991:48).

Ideally the best beginnings for the development and implementation of a programme such as the LCVP should combine elements from all 3 stages mentioned. We must also appreciate that the implementation of change is not a linear process but rather one in which events at one stage can feed back to alter decisions made at a previous stage. Development is evolutionary. Therefore it's not beneficial to lay down rigid plans. Rather it's important to get started and constantly make amendments. Significant change involves a certain amount of ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty, therefore effective implementation is really a process of clarification.

The literature suggests that the real challenges of initiating and implementing educational change come in the relationships between new programmes, such as the LCVP and the thousands of subjective realities embedded in people's individual and organizational contexts. Therefore how these subjective realities are addressed or ignored is crucial for whether potential changes become meaningful at the level of individual use and effectiveness. The challenges posed in implementing educational change are varied and numerous and in many cases depend on individual schools and their cultures. Hargreaves et al (1996:47) outline a number of reasons why the planning and implementation of educational change may be difficult. They are as follows:

- The reasons for change may not be clearly demonstrated; who will benefit and why?
- The change may be too ambitious.
- The change may be proceeding too quickly or slowly.
- There may be a lack of resources in the school.
- There may be a lack of long-term commitment on behalf of the staff to traditional patterns of assessment and assessment requirements.
- Students may not be involved in the change or may not have had it explained to them. As a result they cling to ways of learning they are familiar with.
- Parents may oppose the change because they are kept at a distance from it. In addition, there may be parental pressure for traditional academic standards and subject based qualifications.
- School leaders may be too controlling causing problems of bureaucracy and work overload.

- The change may be pursued in isolation or it may be poorly co-ordinated and become wrapped up in a series of other changes and the teachers may suffer form overload. To avoid this it is advised that a collaborative school culture is established.

Hargreaves et al (1996:47)

In addition Ireland's education system is centralised. Therefore when the DES launches initiatives, they are often seen as blueprints. If change involved implementing single, well-developed proven innovations, one at a time, perhaps it could be blueprinted. But schools are in the business of implementing an array of multiple innovations and policies simultaneously therefore it is not that easy. Change is thus slow due to bureaucracy.

The literature suggests that for teachers and schools to be effective in implementing change they need to focus on making a difference with individual students, but they must also work on school wide change to create conditions that will be most effective in helping students learn. We must develop a shared vision in relation to the anticipated aims of the initiative. But visions for schools and their anticipated outcomes can't be forced. They must evolve over time, so that commitment to the new programme evolves. Generally visions die prematurely when they are mere paper products churned out and when they attempt to impose false consensus. In addition, ownership cannot be achieved in advance of learning something new. As people talk, try things out, inquire and re try, people become skilled, ideas become clearer and a shared commitment becomes stronger. However it's worth noting that Stacey (1992), cited in Fullan (1993:30), believes reliance on visions can perpetuate cultures of dependence and conformity that obstruct the questioning and complex learning that should take place. The critical question we must therefore ask ourselves is not whether visions are important, but how they can be shaped and reshaped, given the complexity of planning and implementing educational change.

The involvement of all the partners especially within the school is another obstacle schools must try to overcome. Fullan (1993:34) states that, "for complex change you need many people working insightfully...omitting themselves to concentrated action together". However in moving towards greater collaboration we should not lose sight

of the good side of individualism. Where possible we should strive to honour individualism and collegiality simultaneously. We must realise that everybody has something to offer and every person is a change agent. In this respect every teacher has the responsibility to help create a school capable of individual and collective inquiry and continuous renewal.

> If teachers and others want to make a difference...moral purpose by itself is not good enough. Moral purpose needs an engine, and that engine is individual, skilled change agents pushing for changes around them, intersecting with other like-minded individuals and groups to form the critical mass necessary to bring about continuous improvements
>
> (Fullan, 1993: 40).

With regard to the initiation and implementation of a programme like the LCVP, because people are involved, it is inevitable that problems will arise. They may be ones of resistance, fear of the unknown or the perceived unsuitability of the innovation. We often perceive problems as a sign of failure and fear them but as Fullan points out "effective organisations embrace problems rather than avoid them" (Fullan 1993:26). They are inevitable and you can't learn or be successful without them because they are the route to deeper change and satisfaction. But for the long-term implementation to be successful it requires that we develop problem-finding techniques and regularly review our decisions because it is perceived that inquiry is the engine of vitality and self-renewal, (cited by Pascale 1990:14 in Fullan 1993:26). Research by Louis and Miles (1990) highlights that the least successful schools engaged in shallow coping, doing nothing and easing off while the successful school go deeper to probe underlying reasons and make substantial intervention like staff training and redesigning programmes. "Problems are our friends but only if you do something about them" (Fullan 1993:28).

The Role of the Teacher

Darling Hammond (1995) indicates that the successful implementation of educational change depends on teachers developing shared beliefs of what ought to be, having a clear focus on improving teaching and learning and being involved collaboratively in decision making, whilst having a means to deal with issues openly. But we must acknowledge that when teachers are faced with implementing change, they are faced with a number of challenges such as a change in their behaviour, attitudes and beliefs.

In order to address teacher's anxieties and questions and facilitate the successful implementation of a programme such as the LCVP the literature suggests that a collaborative culture (discussed in the next section) should exist in the school. It highlights that the people factor outweighs the importance of structures and organisations when deciding on, implementing and evaluating change. The power of teacher collegiality is well illustrated in Littles' (1982) work, cited in (Fullan 1991.53) and by Lieberman & Miller (1999) who highlight that "when teachers have opportunities to work, plan, and be together, they can achieve enhanced individual goals in their classrooms even as they are accomplishing collective ones for the school", (Lieberman & Miller, 1999:78). Although in-service and skill training workshops are advisable, when teachers do get help the most effective source is said to be other teachers and this should not be underestimated. Implementation also tends to be successful when teachers and administrators plan, design and evaluate teaching materials and practices together. But it must be mentioned that the reality for many teachers is that the cellular organization of schools forces them to struggle with their problems privately. This physical isolation means teachers don't often develop a common professional culture.

Bascia and Hargreaves (2000), Bailey (2000) & Sarason (1991) all conclude that teachers have a pivotal role as the rank and file implementers and designers and advocates of implementing educational change but they are essentially left out. Therefore we need to focus on processes that will ensure teacher involvement allowing them develop ownership of the programme or policy being implemented. Coolahan (1995) stresses that the initiation for implementation does not have to be top down, as we commonly perceive. Instead the experience, knowledge and creation of practising teachers must play a part, "it's the business and responsibility of all" (Coolahan, 1995:10). For the future successful implementation of educational change, policy-makers must acknowledge teacher involvement as an integral aspect. "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think, it's as simple and complex as that" (Fullan 1991:117).

The Role of School Culture

Many new educational initiatives don't succeed for a number of reasons, one being the neglect of an important factor, the context in which the change is occurring, that is the school culture. The culture of a school can be defined as "the knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, morals, rituals, symbols and language" or the "way of life" of a group of people, (Hargreaves 1995:25). If we are to implement significant curricular change we must have an appreciation of the forces tending to preserve the status quo as well as those making for change and must recognise that change requires abandonment of practices as well as adoption of new ones. There is a general agreement that school culture affects school improvement and change initiatives because if structures change without changes in school culture the change is likely to be superficial and this is a danger with all externally generated reforms, according to Stoll & Fink (1996). They believe understanding your schools culture is a vital part of the successful development and implementation of educational change. Generally there are four forms of school culture that exist each one having implications for the implementation of educational change. I will briefly discuss each one.

Teaching has long been identified as a profession where people essentially work alone. In a *culture of individualism*, teachers develop a structure to their work but it isolates them from their colleagues and ties them to what is immediate in the classroom. This type of culture resists educational innovation. It does not encourage the consultative process believed to be important in successful curricular implementation. Murray (1995) believes it means the collective wisdom and experience of all teachers can't be harnessed. However we must appreciate that individualism within a school culture is not totally negative. Fullan (1992) highlights that individualism and collectivism should have equal footing in schools. Therefore while trying to eliminate "individualism" defined as a pattern of working on ones' own we should not dismiss "individuality" which allows the individual teacher to be creative, "individuality is still the key to personal renewal, which in turn is the foundation for collective renewal", (Fullan 1992:59).

A *culture of contrived collegiality* is an attempt by the administration of schools to introduce a form of collaboration that they can control. According to Law and Glover (2000) post primary schools are generally characterised by emphasis on "formal

demarcation of roles and responsibilities where focus is on procedure...this can be problematic at times of change, (Law and Glover 2000:117). This type of culture manifests itself in a set of formal and specific bureaucratic measures.

A *culture of balkanisation* separates teachers into isolated and often competing groups within a school. According to Huberman (1993) sub-cultures with specific agendas can often evolve and these can prove a powerful barrier to whole school communication and collegiality, which are reported to facilitate the successful planning and implementation of educational change. Balkanisation can also inhibit the responsiveness of teachers to outside innovations, making them protective of their own classrooms as they may feel threatened by new programmes or innovations. Law & Glover (2000:125) stress the compartilisation of secondary education encourages balkanisation or at best only contrived collegiality because of things like a lack of time and the perceived incompatibility of individuals.

The creation of a *collaborative work culture* has for a long time been called for, in order to counter the widespread individualism, that impairs and inhibits a schools willingness to implement educational change. Collaborative work cultures foster and build upon qualities of openness, trust and support between teachers thriving on their collective experience. This is very important on a programme like the LCVP because teachers are able to learn from each other. Schools characterised by this type of culture require broad agreement on educational values but they also accept disagreement. These schools are places of hard work and strong commitment and they create a happy work environment. However this type of culture does not just appear, it evolves over time. Truly collaborative cultures are "deep personal and enduring" (Hargreaves 1991:14) they are not mounted just for specific projects. Hargreaves (1994) believes that if schools are to be effective in planning and implementing educational change in the future, then cultures must be developed which simultaneously promote collegiality and individuality.

> Not only must the schools culture promote group learning to enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers but it must also honour the individual the 'maverick' because creativity and novelty will be required to deal with an unknowable future
>
> (Stoll and Fink cited in Hargreaves, 1998:297)

None of this is to deny that isolation can be a protection from scrutiny and a barrier to improvement, but it does say that we must put the question of autonomy and collaboration in a perspective conducive to assessing the conditions under which each might be appropriate. Collaborative cultures are linked with norms and opportunities for continuous improvement because the implementation of educational change,

> takes place when members of a school community recognise...a need to change...and provided with shared process...establish a shared language...for on going communication, research and professional interaction, a highly participatory structure...that incorporates all members
>
> (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996: 93).

In schools with collaborative cultures goals are regularly re-examined to ensure that they meet the needs of the pupils. Trust and support encourage risk taking and help improve the learning process. Therefore the school culture influences the consultative process believed to be essential for successful implementation of educational change.

The Role of School Leadership

Initiation of educational change never occurs without an advocate, one of the most important being the Principal. Successful implementation requires school leaders who are able to engage mindfully with the schools culture and who involve teachers integrally and meaningfully as team members in the planning and implementation process. Stoll and Fink (1995) argue that school leaders should "respect others, trust others and act with intentionally to build ...relationships which result in collaborative school cultures", (1995:114). Sarason (1990:16) highlights that "top-down, bottom-up change engenders more commitment than either an autocratic or a centralised approach".

> Leadership is not carried out by 'lone rangers'. It's effective insofar as the leader can attract and nurture the leadership of others in the school. The job of the principal is to invite everyone to participate,
>
> (Starratt, 1995:94).

In addition, Law & Glover (2000) point out, that school leaders where possible

> should reject the idea of bringing about change based on rigid, predetermined blue prints in favour of working to a rough outline map flexible enough to allow substantial adaptations to be made in the light of experience,
>
> (Law & Glover, 2000:139).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the imposition of innovations can create anxiety and confusion for teachers therefore driving them further from a sense of their own expertise and professionalism. Reflection and critical thinking need to be nurtured. Law and Glover (2000) report that successful school leaders engaged teacher's commitment to a shared vision and modelled their cultural beliefs through leadership by example. School leadership should assist change through support, helping develop teacher commitments and capacities to engage in reform. Fullan (1995) found that schools with such increased the capacity of teachers to engage in collective learning and made more progress implementing curricular innovations.

Law and Glover (2000) also highlight that school leaders need the capacity to communicate at a range of levels in various modes so they can articulate the reasons behind their ideas in order to gain staff support. As a result the two-way relationship of pressure, support and continuous negotiation deemed essential for successful planning and implementation can materialise. Such school leaders are referred to as "Initiators" or "Transformational Leaders" in the literature and they are reported as being very successful in implementing educational change. "Transformational leaders bring people to act on behalf of the collective interests of their group or community", (Starratt, 1995:109). They work more with staff and support innovations.

> Successful school principals exhibit a feel for the change process, engage teacher's commitment to a shared vision and model their cultural beliefs through leadership by example
>
> (Stoll and Fink, 1995:107).

Conclusion

In an era characterised by rapid societal change, education systems are striving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse society. This involves adopting new programmes and adapting old ones. The implications for those involved in formulating and delivering such alternative programmes warrant focus. Along with the trauma of the implementation process itself, changes in the nature of classroom teaching, relationships with colleagues and students, use of resources and responsibility for decision making create staff training and development needs in order that the challenges raised by such curriculum alterations are met.

Gary Granville (1995) contends "the failure to disseminate successful innovation...has been one of the most frustrating aspects of curriculum development in Ireland over the past twenty years" (1995:144). Crooks (1983:73) outlines the lessons he feels can be learned from the experiences of the last 20 years. These include:

- The importance of the involvement of teachers
- The need for support and in service training
- The role of school culture
- The role of the Principal

There are no easy answers to the questions arising during the planning for the implementation of curriculum change. The strength of the literature lies in its ability to illustrate the factors necessary for the successful implementation of change but schools are largely left to fend for themselves as regards the development of these factors. Fullan (1992) himself admits that the literature seems daunting to educators and stresses that it is best used as "an inspiration rather than a blueprint" (1992:18) for successful change in any school.

Chapter Three
Methodology

This chapter will give an account of the research methodology for this study and its rationale. The selection of the research population and approaches used to gather data and analyse it are explained and justified. The validity and applicability of the research design are then discussed.

Rationale for the Study

The LCVP has been developed as a curricular innovation comprised of the main elements of the established LC in addition to a more vocational focus through the Link Modules. It is hoped that this curricular development at senior cycle would retain some of the students who were not completing senior cycle education, while in addition helping them develop the skills deemed necessary to gain employment in the rapidly evolving society of to day. While no thorough evaluation of the programme has been completed at national level to date it is the general feeling from work by Granville (2002) that the programme, especially in relation to the Link Modules has been extremely successful. However, three years after its iniatation in the study school the programme is being discontinued. In the light of findings from this investigation I will assess the conditions deemed necessary for the successful implementation of educational innovations. This study, explores the meanings of aspects of the implementation process for those involved and looks at how they relate to and are influenced by their particular setting and by internal and external factors. I am primarily interested in the teacher's perceptions of what makes implementation of curricular innovations successful at school level because to a large degree they are responsible for such. As Sarason (1990) reports "teachers can block change if they don't understand the reason for it and or are given no involvement in the decision making process", (Sarason, 1990:89).

Design of the Study

Twelve teachers involved in teaching LCVP students in the school year 2003/2004, in addition to the LCVP co-ordinator, are the focus of this study. Although a number of these teachers have been involved in teaching the programme since it was first introduced in the school three years ago, some of the group are teaching the programme for the first time.

The purpose of my questionnaires (Appendix I) and focus group discussion (Appendix II) with teachers is to:

- Ascertain their perceptions of the course itself, especially in relation to its rationale.
- Establish their experience of implementation at school level.
- Evaluate factors they believe affect implementation at school level.
- Get their views on the extent of teacher involvement in implementation in the school.
- Ascertain the degree of evaluation that has occurred in relation to this programme at school level.
- Describe the role of in-service in the process of implementation.

The purpose of my interview (Appendix III) with the co-ordinator of the LCVP is to:

- Establish the role of the co-ordinator in the implementation process.
- Get his views on the role of the parents in the implementation process.
- Establish the role of in service in implementation.
- Evaluate the factors deemed necessary for successful programme implementation.
- Describe his perception of the LCVP.
- Evaluate the role of management in the change process.
- Describe evaluation of the programme at school level.

Anderson et al. (1994:2) use the terms "practitioner research" or "insider research" to describe the type of research undertaken by those who use their own

site (classroom, school, community) as the focus of their study. Munn and Drever (1995:3) point out that one of the strengths of teachers researching their own practice is that they already know a great deal about the school, the staff and the students. They also state however that this form of "insider" research can have a drawback in that "things are taken for granted that ought to be held in question". In designing the research instruments I was conscious of the need to maintain objectivity and distance in so far as was possible and attempted to follow the advice of Johnson (1994:10) and take on a "new role of detached enquirer, that is additional to and to some degree separated from your usual work". It is intended that the methods of data collection chosen for this study will assist me in eliminating subjective bias that may arise from her close involvement with the subject of the research.

My initial literature review, in addition to examining reports and evaluation on the LCVP, helped me to sharpen the focus of my investigations and enabled me to refine my research questions. I decided to confine my study to my own school. My existing knowledge of the school, in its present form as a Community School and in its past capacity as a secondary school, meant that I did not need formal permission for access to the school. This also facilitated me with an ease of access in distributing and collecting questionnaires and in the scheduling of the focus group discussion. My own prior experience of the school could also be used as a tool to validate findings. The fact that the study was being carried out in my own school also meant that colleagues were going to be one of the main research "instruments" used. It meant for a period that I would have to interact with them in a different role and I would have to assure them of the confidentiality of the information they were providing for the purpose of my research. The purpose of my study was outlined to all involved and their involvement was totally voluntary.

The data required for this study is information on teachers perceptions of factors deemed necessary to assist in the successful implementation of curricular innovations at school level. To gather this data it was decided to use a combined methodology approach of questionnaires, a focus group discussion and an interview.

Features of the Research Methodology

This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. In using a focus group discussion and an interview I am speaking to people in order to discover "what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences and how they structure the social world in which they live" (Bogdan and Biklen 1976:30). A strong qualitative dimension has been included as it is seen to be the most appropriate means of gaining in depth insight into the personal side of the success/failure of the LCVP in the school. Qualitative research involves the study of people: their behaviour and their interactions with others. It aims to reveal people's ideals and beliefs, and to uncover the reasons for what they do. The specific combination used include three features (1) Questionnaires, (2) Focus Group Discussion (3) Interview. Each of these approaches will now be examined in more detail.

(1) Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used as the initial survey instrument and the information gathered from these informed the construction of the interview schedule. Such an approach allowed for the convenient collection of data from the teachers, given the time constraints they were under and the heavy workload that daily school life presented. The data gathered, provided a starting point for the more qualitative methods that would be employed at a later stage.

The advantages of questionnaires in small scale research are well documented by Johnson (1994) and Munn and Drever (1995). Questionnaires are an efficient use of time, offer anonymity to the respondent, give the possibility of a high response rate and allow the use of standardised questions. However there are also limitations in using a questionnaire, as Munn and Drever (1995) point out. They state that information collected tends to describe rather than explain why things are the way they are; there is a possibility that the information collected may be superficial ; the time taken to draft and pilot the questionnaire is often underestimated and so the usefulness of the questionnaire is reduced if preparation is inadequate. In preparing the questionnaire I was conscious of the advice of Munn and Drever (1995:9): "a well designed questionnaire yields unambiguous

information and good response rate. Sloppy drafting means the questions are ambiguous, categories are imprecise and you risk alienating your respondents". To ensure the success of the questionnaire I piloted it with 5 other teachers who helped me to specify if questions were clear or if I needed to add in further questions of relevance.

Generally six areas were identified which I wished to explore and these provided the framework for the questionnaire. A mix of closed and open ended questions was used and teachers were invited to expand on their answers if they wished to. The areas to be investigated were as follows:

1. Attitudes of teachers to the rationale of the LCVP in general.
2. Programme implementation at school level.
3. Factors affecting implementation.
4. Teacher involvement in curricular innovations.
5. School evaluation of innovations.
6. In-Service Support for the LVCP.

Johnson (1994:43) warns that response rates fall off with lengthy questionnaires, yet Hoinville and Jowell (1978:127) dispute this. They point out that for certain cases, in which members of special populations know a good deal about the subject of the study, they may react negatively to what seems a trivial treatment if a complex subject is enquired into by a short questionnaire. They contend that the appearance of a questionnaire is more important than its length. In drafting and piloting the questionnaire I was mindful of this advice.

After the piloting it was decided to distribute questionnaire to the 12 teachers in the school who were actually teaching students of the LCVP, as I felt they were a very good source of accurate information on issues of implementation regarding the LCVP. They provided me with considered opinions on specific issues and also voiced their feelings on the strengths and weaknesses about the way the innovation was adopted and implemented within the school. As a result of the LCVP students being a base class, I selected the first 12 teachers from the LCVP base class timetable in the staffroom to take part in this research. For certain subjects, namely (Irish, English, and Maths) the LCVP students were mixed with

other senior level students so some of the teachers only had a small number of students in their classes. However every teacher who completed a questionnaire had LCVP students in their classes. General opinions and feedback provided the basis for the focus group discussion that followed. Of the 12.teachers that took part in the research I was gratified with a 100% response rate.

(2) Focus Groups

Focus groups are a form of group interview, but unlike an interview which is an interaction between two adults, the reliance here is on the interaction within the group who discuss a topic supplied by the person doing the research. The group interact with each other rather than the interviewer and "it is from the interaction of the group that the data emerge" (Cohen et al 2000:288). Focus groups are however a contrived setting where a group of people are brought together to discuss an issue, and herein lie their strengths and weaknesses. Focus groups are unnatural settings, yet are very focused on a particular issue. They produce large amounts of data in relatively short space of time but "they tend to produce less data than interviews with the same number of individuals on a one to one basis" (Cohen et al 2000:288).

Focus groups are useful for:

- Developing an orientation to a specific topic.
- Developing a theme or topic to be followed by subsequent interviews.
- Generating hypotheses that arise from the data of the group.
- Generating and evaluating data.

(Cohen et al 2000)

Several issues must be addressed when deciding to run focus groups:

1. How many focus groups should be held? (One is sufficient if the result may be specific to that particular group.)
2. How many should be in the group?
3. The researcher must ensure that the group is similar in background.
4. The researcher must ensure that the participants have something to say and feel comfortable saying it.

5. Focus groups work better if they are composed of relative strangers than friends, unless the issue for the group is something that can only be discussed among friends.

Focus group discussions are a common way of collecting qualitative data. The main purpose of the discussion is to obtain a special kind of information. I wanted to collect some sensitive information on personal opinions and attitudes and all teachers involved agreed they would be more comfortable having a semi-structured discussion as opposed to being interviewed alone. Initially there were to be 12 teachers involved in the discussion group but only 9 took part on the day. 2 of the teachers were ill on the specified day and the other teacher was involved in preparations for the oral French exams which were being held in the school at the time. However the group was a perfect size as it allowed all participants to speak. The group conversation was based on a list of topics that needed clarification after the questionnaires had been analysed. The discussion was guided by a list of questions that I wanted to explore further. The exact wording or order of the questions was not predetermined but developed in response to the discussion situation. Listening skills were very important, so I used a dictaphone with the permission of all participants. This allowed me to steer the discussion if it went off the topic and to get the most out of their feedback, whilst at the same time ensuring that everything said was preserved for analysis.

The focus group discussion was conducted in the school in the Year Head room, as all participants felt comfortable there. Comfortable chairs, tea and coffee were provided. All efforts were made to keep outside noise to a minimum. I sought the permission of the deputy principal to conduct this part of my research, as it required all participants to be free from class or other duties at the same time for approximately one-hour. It facilitated me in gathering information that I had not previously gathered through the questionnaire, whilst also enabling me to see things from a different perspective.

The tape was turned on at the start of the discussion. I outlined my study purposes to them and the rationale behind the focus group discussion. Topics to be covered were also outlined. I started the discussion with a general question on

LCVP, before focusing on the main issues to be explored. Such an approach allowed a relaxed, open atmosphere to develop. All participants were assured of anonymity, and were encouraged to call back after the discussion if there was any part of it they wanted to delete or verify.

During the discussion I took opportunities to probe for clarification, explanation and collaboration in the hope of producing accurate and valid data. Immediately after the discussion, I wrote up some notes of the discussion. I later transcribed the discussion from the tape onto paper to allow me identify emergent themes.

(3) Interview

It was felt that it would be fruitful to interview the LCVP co-ordinator in order to supplement and clarify the available data. Powney and Watts (1987) describe interviews as "conversational encounters with a purpose". They further state that it is the explicit intentions and actions of the researcher, or interviewer, which converts a chat between two or more people into a 'study' of phenomena. They also point out some of the problems facing insider research "...there is a frequent dilemma of the researcher not being willing to ask apparently obvious, but necessary questions. Or respondents may not answer fully because they believe, or know, that the researcher already has the answer", (Powney and Watts 1987:50).

The interview was drawn up and guided by the analysis of the questionnaires and also by issues arising out of research on the topic. The interview consisted of a series of general questions designed to explore the ideas, experiences and perceptions of the coordinator and allowed further questions to be asked depending on his responses. The following areas were explored in the interview:

1. Ascertain the role of the co-ordinator in the implementation process.
2. Describe the role of the parents in the implementation process.
3. Establish the role of in-service training in the implementation process.
4. Evaluate factors deemed necessary for successful programme implementation.

5. Investigate his perception of the LCVP.
6. Evaluate the role of management in the change process.
7. Establish the extent of evaluation of the programme at school level.

The value of using the interview as a method of acquiring in depth information is supported by Borg and Gall (1983). However, Borg and Gall warn of the possibility of both interviewer and interviewee bias. Either may be eager to please, or may be hostile. Therefore, planning the interview is extremely important in order to be as objective as possible. Methods of recording the interview include note taking, video recording, and tape recording. Tape recording and note taking were decided upon for gathering data in this case study.

The word interview has formal connotations. I wished the interview situation to be less formal and more along the lines of an open discussion. There emerged a greater opportunity for honest opinions and ideas, where both interviewer and interviewee were more equal than when in a formal interview setting.

Generally the interview with the co-ordinator was used as a from of "triangulation" in order to validate previous findings from the questionnaires and the focus group discussion whilst also giving some input with regard to the role of the co-ordinator in the implementation process. An interview is described as a "purposeful conversation between two people that is directed by one in order to get information" (Bogdan and Biklen 1978:135).

Administering the Research Instruments

Before distributing the questionnaires to the teachers a meeting was arranged with the school principal. The purpose of this meeting was to go through the questionnaire with her question by question, allowing her to assess the suitability of the questions in her opinion whilst also explaining the reason for asking each of the questions. On the day in question the principal was not available to perform this task so the deputy principal obliged. On examining the questionnaire he deemed it suitable for distribution among the staff.

The questionnaires were distributed to the 12 LCVP teachers on Friday the 6th of February 2004, with an accompanying letter explaining the purpose of the research and requesting their assistance. All the questionnaires (100%) were completed and returned by Friday the 13th of February 2004.

The focus group discussion took place in the last week of March, following a detailed analysis of the completed questionnaires. Permission was requested to make an audio tape recording of the focus group discussion and all the teachers agreed to this. The time and place for the discussion group was designed to accommodate interviewees and took place in a quiet room in the school building where the discussion could not be overheard by others or be interrupted. The focus group discussion lasted approximately one hour.

In order to supplement information retrieved from both the questionnaires and the focus group discussion the LCVP school co-ordinator was also interviewed. The interview with the LCVP co-ordinator took place in the first week of March. Again in a similar way to the focus group discussion, the co-ordinator was approached in advance and the reasons for the interview were clearly explained. After the aim of the interview was established he agreed to take part in the research. Permission was sought and granted to make an audio tape of the interview. The time of the interview was arranged to accommodate his busy schedule at this time of the academic year. The interview took place in his office within the school grounds. This interview lasted about 45 minutes.

Summary

The general aim of the questionnaires, the focus group discussion and the interview was to encourage the teachers to reflect upon their role in the implementation of curricular innovations such as the LCVP at school level in a critical and systematic manner and, following such reflection, to offer their considered views to the researcher. The findings of the research are outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

The Findings of the Research

Presentation and Preliminary Analysis

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three parts as follows:

- Part A presents the findings from the questionnaires and provides some pre-liminary analysis of them.
- Part B presents the findings from the qualitative data derived from the focus group discussion that took place with a number of LCVP teachers.
- Part C presents the findings from the interview with the LCVP co-ordinator.

A more detailed analysis of these findings will be presented in Chapter Five.

Part A: Findings from the questionnaires

The purpose of the questionnaires was to obtain the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers involved in LCVP about the implementation of curricular innovations at school level. In presenting the findings each question is restated and, where necessary, the statistical data is presented in written and diagram form. A representative sample of comments made by the respondents is included where they offer clarification on the choices made.

The questionnaires were issued to the twelve teachers on Friday the 6th of February and were returned on the 13th of February. All teachers returned completed questionnaires.

Questions 1-3 sought information of a general nature about the respondents. It attempts to assess the amount of their teaching experience and the range and extent of this experience.

Question 1

Gender

The profile of the respondents was one male to eleven females. This is not unusual, given the fact that the school is composed of a 92% female staff and it is an all-girl's school.

Question 2

Please state the number of years you have been teaching

The teaching experience of the teachers ranged from one year to more than ten years. Of the teachers questioned 58% of the respondents were teaching for ten or more years. This seems to be in keeping with the commitment of the management to allocate teachers with more experience to new curricular innovations. 25% of respondents had one to five years experience and 17% had between six and ten years experience.

Question 3

What subjects do you teach?

The teachers involved in the LCVP come from a wide variety of subject disciplines both academic and vocational. The subject areas may be classified as follows:

Academic/ General	6 Teachers	(English, Irish, French, Business, Science, Maths)
Vocational/ Practical	3 Teachers	(Art, Home Economics, I.T.)
Social /Personal	3 Teachers	(Religion, Careers, SPHE, CSPE)

Questions 4-6 attempted to get some information on the teacher's attitudes to the LCVP and its overall rationale, as defined by the DES.

Question 4

Do you believe there is a need for the LCVP in the school and explain why?

100% of the respondents believed there was a need for LCVP in the school. They outlined a number of reasons for thinking this. The general consensus was that

vocational education is a must for life in today's world, especially in relation to preparation for the world of work, college and life in general. The presence of project-based assessment in addition to purely terminal assessment was also noted favourably. However other reasons for believing the LCVP would be beneficial to students in the school are worth noting because it highlights a lack of knowledge and understanding about the actual rationale of the programme. Eight of the respondents commented on how this alternative programme could facilitate certain students of differing abilities "who have learning difficulties and for whom the established LC would prove too difficult". One respondent believed that "students are poorly served by the format, structures and academic pressure of the broad based established Leaving Certificate, but the LCVP addresses this to an extent". One respondent felt "students deserved the opportunity to reach their Leaving Certificate through a less academic route". Generally these responses highlight a lack of understanding among the surveyed teachers about the general structures of the LCVP, in terms of its overall format and assessment requirements. However the reasons for this lack of understanding might be explained by responses to later questions in relation to the processes engaged in before offering the programme in the school and also in relation to in-service training.

Question 5

In your view, to what extent has the rationale of the LCVP been *understood* among the teachers in the school? Please explain your answer

8 (67%) of the respondents believed that the rationale of the LCVP was understood to little or no extent, with 4 (33%) believing it was moderately understood. What this highlights is that *none* of the respondents felt it was greatly understood. This is more in line with the findings of the previous question which highlighted their general lack of understanding about the structure or rationale of the programme. The reasons they outlined for why it was not *understood* were very interesting and I believe are worth noting so they are listed below:

- "Teachers were never given an opportunity to explore the programme and plan its implementation and suitability for our student cohort".

- "I only said it was moderately *understood* because the staff involved in the link modules would have had a good understanding of the rationale of the programme, nobody else seems to!!"
- "no guidance was given to the staff".
- "no induction, no monitoring, no advising, no real leadership was there".
- "It was a programme used for weaker students, which is wrong".
- "There was not enough staff consultation".
- "There is never talk of LCVP at staff meetings, it seems marginalised".

Question 6

To what extent in your view was the rationale *realised* in the school?

(58%) 7 of the 12 respondents believed the rationale was *realised* in the school to a moderate extent with the other 5 (42%) feeling the rationale was not realised. So again, no respondents felt it was greatly realised. Some of the reasons given in answers to question 5 might help to explain this.

Question 7

Do you teach any of the Link Modules in LCVP?

One of the respondents taught the "Preparation for the World of Work" module and one respondent taught the "Enterprise Education" module.

Questions 8 – 12 asked teachers to specify and comment on how the implementation of the LCVP was initiated in the school. In relation to this they were asked to comment on the following:

- The extent to which they were involved in the initial decision to offer the LCVP in the school.
- The extent to which parents participated in the decision to offer the programme in the school.
- The internal organisation of the programme with reference to what students and teachers were going to be involved in the programme.

Question 8

What process was engaged in at school level in deciding to offer the programme initially?

It is clear from the responses that the process engaged in initially to offer the programme was not inclusive of all those who would be actually involved, namely the teachers. Although it was reported that the matter did arise at staff meetings and the LCVP co-ordinator did address the staff, it appears that the implementation of the LCVP was not actually discussed but rather "mentioned", as one respondent puts it. It is believed by the majority of respondents (9 of the 12) that no "real thought, planning or consultation" took place within the staff prior to the decision to offer the new programme. However it was reported by one of the respondents who was teaching one of the Link Modules that they did attend in-service. Most of the respondents indicated phrases such as

- "Can't answer because I was not involved"
- "I remember it being mentioned and that was it. Some time later I realised I was going to be teaching the LCVP class".

The general feeling from the questionnaires is summed up in the following sentiment, "management imposed the decision on the school system and no consultation took place".

Question 9

To what extent were you involved in the school's decision to offer LCVP in the school?

The response to this question backs up the findings of the previous question, with 10 (83%) of the respondents stating, that they had little or no involvement in the school's decision to offer the LCVP. The other 2 felt they were moderately involved, with none of the respondents believing they were involved to a great extent in this decision.

Question 10

To the best of your knowledge, to what extent did parents actively participate in the initial decision to offer the programme

3 (25%) of the respondents believed that there was a moderate amount of parental participation in the schools decision to offer LCVP with the other 9 (75%) believing there was little or no involvement in this process.

Question 11

Who, in your view, was involved in making the following curriculum decisions for the LCVP?

- **Decisions regarding the organisation of student groups**

6 teachers stated the career guidance counsellor was responsible for organising the student groups.

3 teachers stated that the principal was responsible for organising the student groups.

2 teachers stated that the Year Head was responsible for organising the student groups.

1 teacher stated that the LCVP co-ordinator was responsible for organising the student groups.

- **Decisions regarding the offering of this curricular innovation**

6 of the teachers believed it was the decision of the career guidance teacher to offer LCVP in the school.

4 of the teachers believed it was the decision of the school Principal to offer LCVP in the school.

2 of the teachers believed it was the decision of the Board of Management to offer LCVP in the school.

- **Decisions regarding what teachers would be involved in teaching the programme**

8 (67%) of the respondents, believed that the Principal was responsible for making the decisions regarding what teachers would be involved in teaching the LCVP in the school. I will refer to this response when I discuss the findings of question 15, which asked whether or not the teachers had a choice in such involvement.

Question 12

How are the students selected for participation in LCVP in the school?

- **They apply for a place**
- **As a result of teacher recommendation**
- **As a result of their academic history**
- **As a result of parents request/ recommendation**

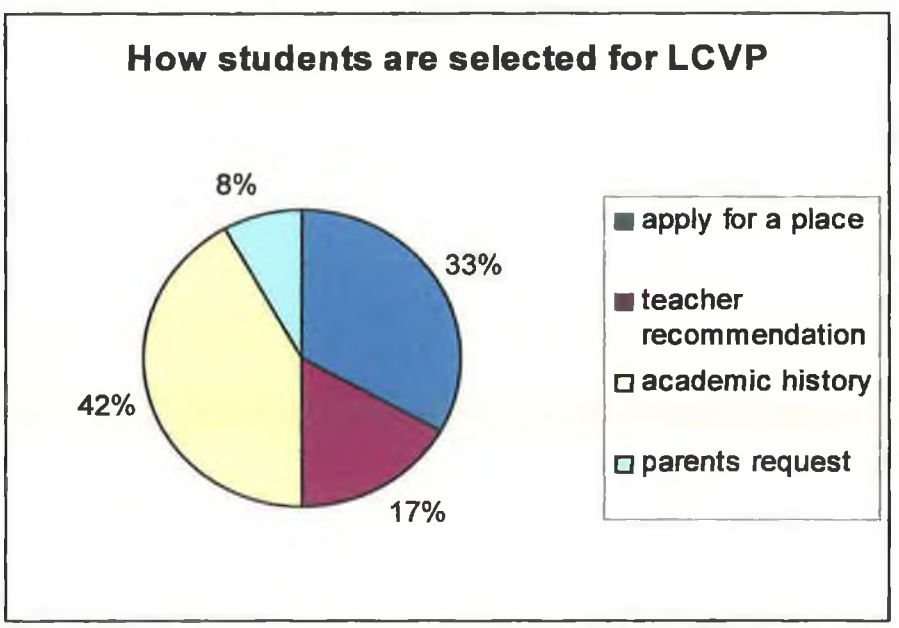
4 Teachers believed students applied for a place on the course.

2 teachers believed their teachers recommended them for the programme

5 teachers believed the students past academic history influenced the likelihood of them doing the LCVP.

1 teacher believed it was at the parents request that

student's got a place on the LCVP course.



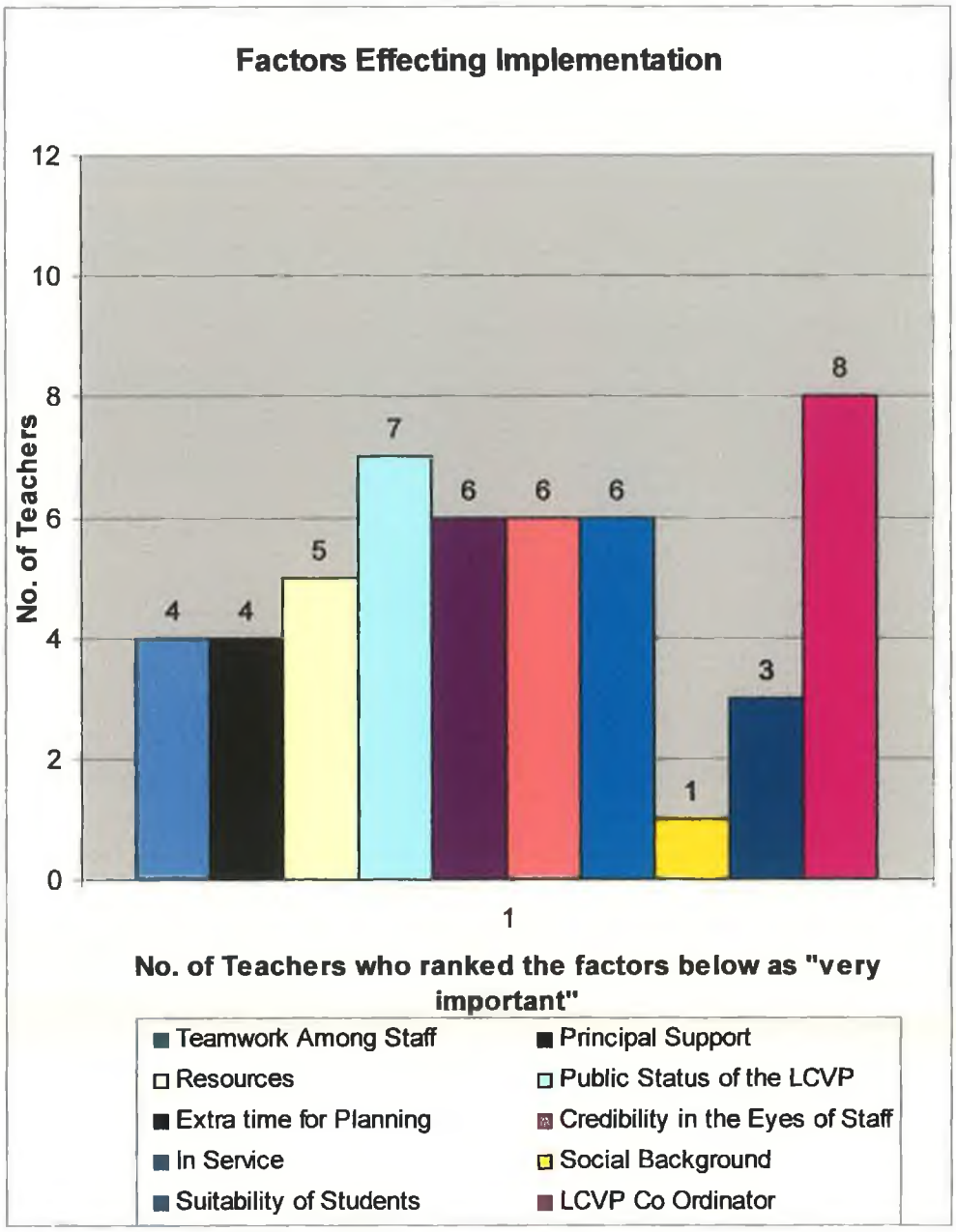
There is no dominant pattern in this response, although it is widely felt that the academic history of the students in the deciding factor in whether they get to participate in this programme. This ties in with the fact that a large number of the respondents believed that the LCVP was actually a programme for the less academic students, as reported in question 1.

Questions 13 & 14 asked the teachers to respond to 10 statements about the importance of certain factors in the implementation process at school level and to rate them on a scale of 1 – 5, with 5 being very important and 1 being unimportant. They were then asked to rank seven possibilities for the failure of the implementation of the LCVP in the school.

Question 13
The Department of Education and Science attributes importance to some of the following factors in implementing curricular innovations such as the LCVP.
In your view, how important are these factors in the implementation of the LCVP at school level.

- **Team work among staff members**
- **Support of Principal**
- **Resources for the new programme**
- **Public status of the new course i.e. the perceptions of parents and pupils**
- **Extra time for planning and curricular development**
- **Credibility of the programme in the eyes of the staff**
- **In-service preparation and training for the programme**
- **Social background of students**
- **Suitability of students (ability and aptitude)**
- **A LCVP co-ordinator**
- **Other Factors**

(It should be noted that some of the graphs show a deficit in relation to the number of respondents. 12 teachers were surveyed but in some cases not all 12 responded, so the graphs are compiled only from the responses received.)



Among the factors that the teachers perceived to be important in the implementation process, the importance of a LCVP co-ordinator ranked highest. The public status of the LCVP also ranked as being surprisingly high. Credibility in the eyes of the staff, extra time for planning and in-service provision ranked as next in importance. Five teachers classed resources as being very important, with four respondents ranking the presence of teamwork and principal support as being very important. The suitability of students was selected by three of the respondents as being very important. The social background of the students

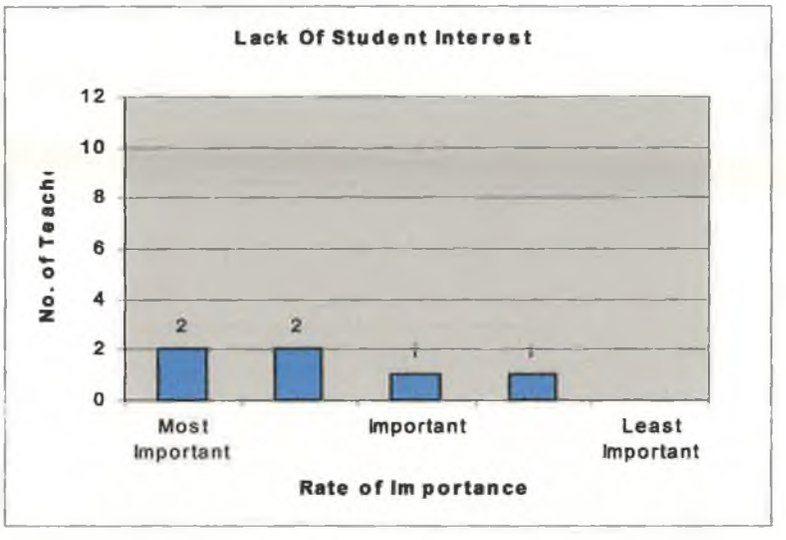
ranked as being the least important factor in the implementation process according to the teachers surveyed. (For a more detailed analysis of the findings from this questions in tabular form see Appendix VII).

Question 14

The LCVP is being discontinued in the school. In your view, what are the chief reasons for this? Please rank the following possibilities on a 1 to 5 scale.

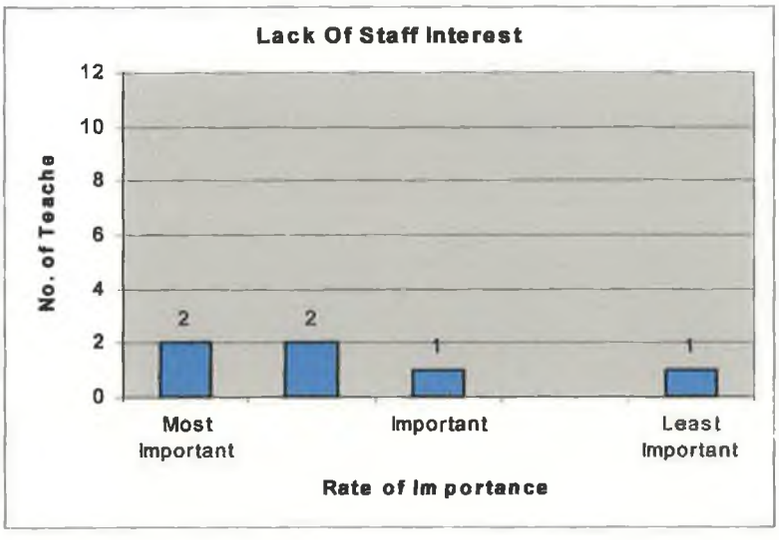
In this question the 12 teachers were asked to rank a number of specified reasons in terms of how they might have influenced the decision to discontinue the LCVP in the school. Again, as in question 13, for some of the graphs all 12 teachers did not respond, so calculations were based purely on the responses received. Even though some responses fell short of the 12 anticipated patterns seem to have emerged. I intend to focus on these aspects in the focus group discussions to seek clarification and additional feedback.

- **Lack of interest among students**



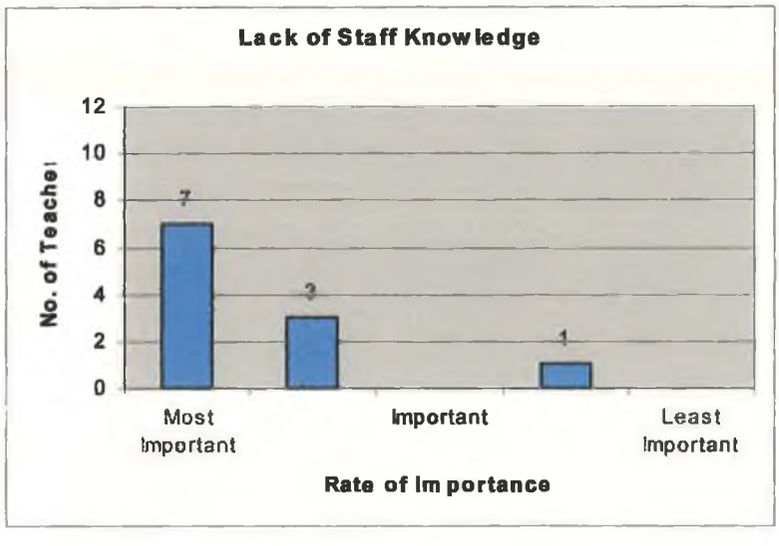
5 out of the 6 respondents felt that a lack of student interest has been influential in ceasing the programme. I will probe this response further in the focus group discussion.

- **Lack of interest among staff**



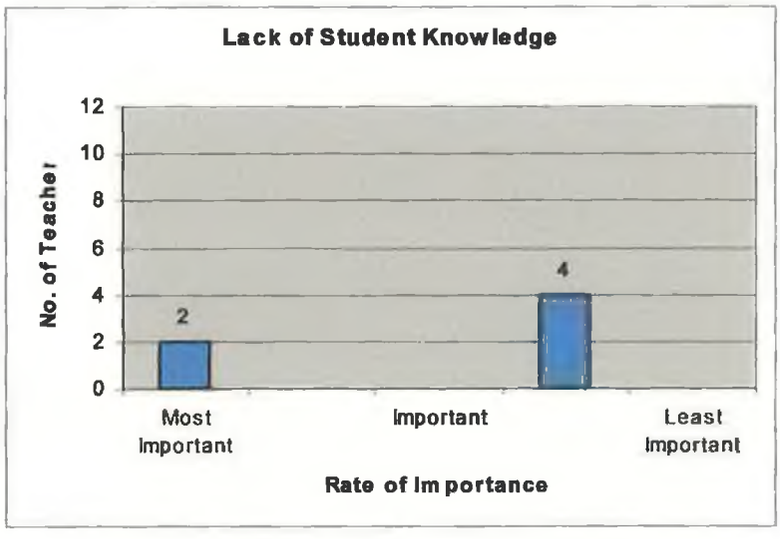
5 out of the 6 teachers who responded believed a lack of staff interest was responsible for the programme being ceased. Although the responses when transferred to the graph do not appear to be noteworthy I think it should be noted that only 6 out of the total 12 teachers responded to this question so the trend is very telling although the graph may not be.

- **Lack of knowledge about the programme among staff**



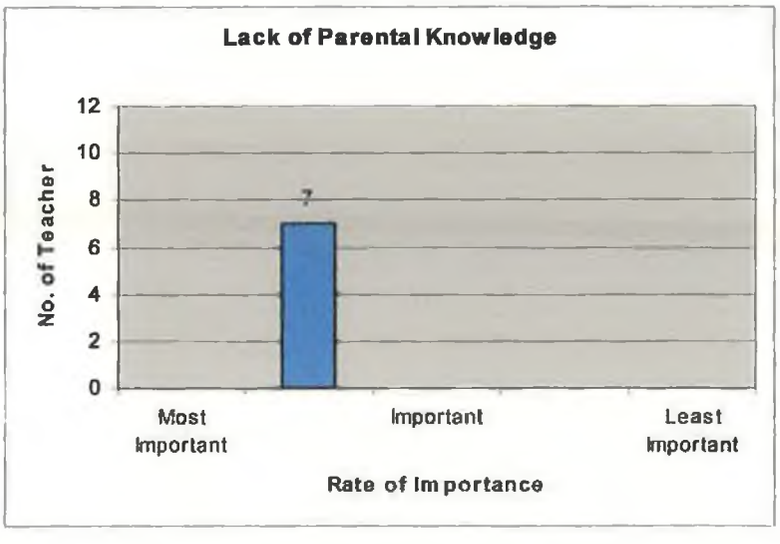
A lack of staff knowledge rated as being important to most important by 10 out of the 11 teachers who responded. This may link with the high response given to the lack of staff interest. If the staff are not aware how can they have an interest?

- **Lack of knowledge about the programme among students**



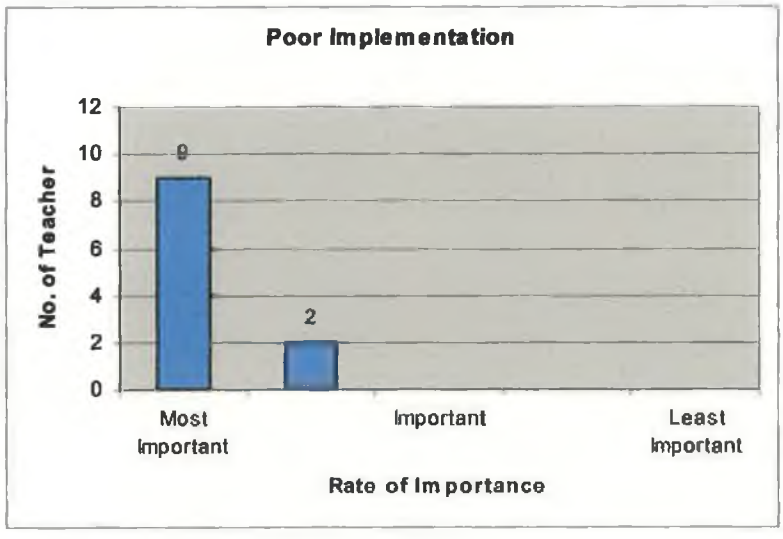
A lack of student knowledge did not rate very high with only 2 out of a possible 6 respondents feeling it was most important.

- **Lack of knowledge about the programme by parents**



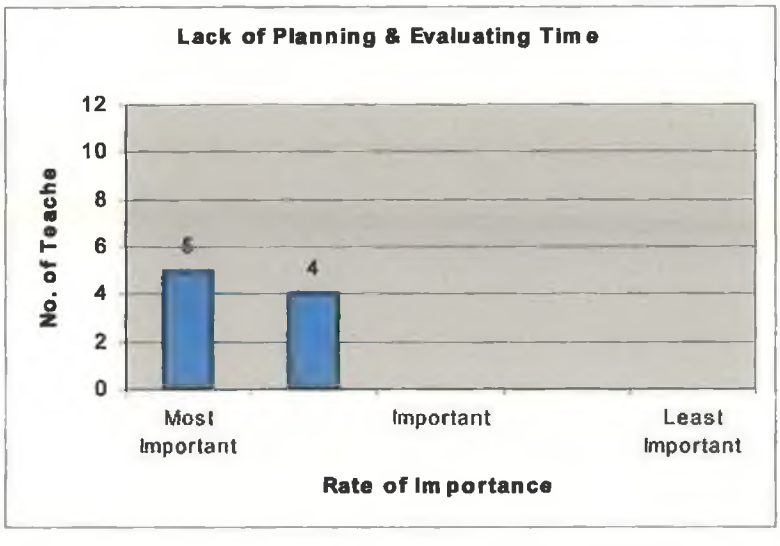
However a lack of parental knowledge rated as being quite high with all 7 respondents placing this aspect in the important to most important category.

- **Poor Implementation**

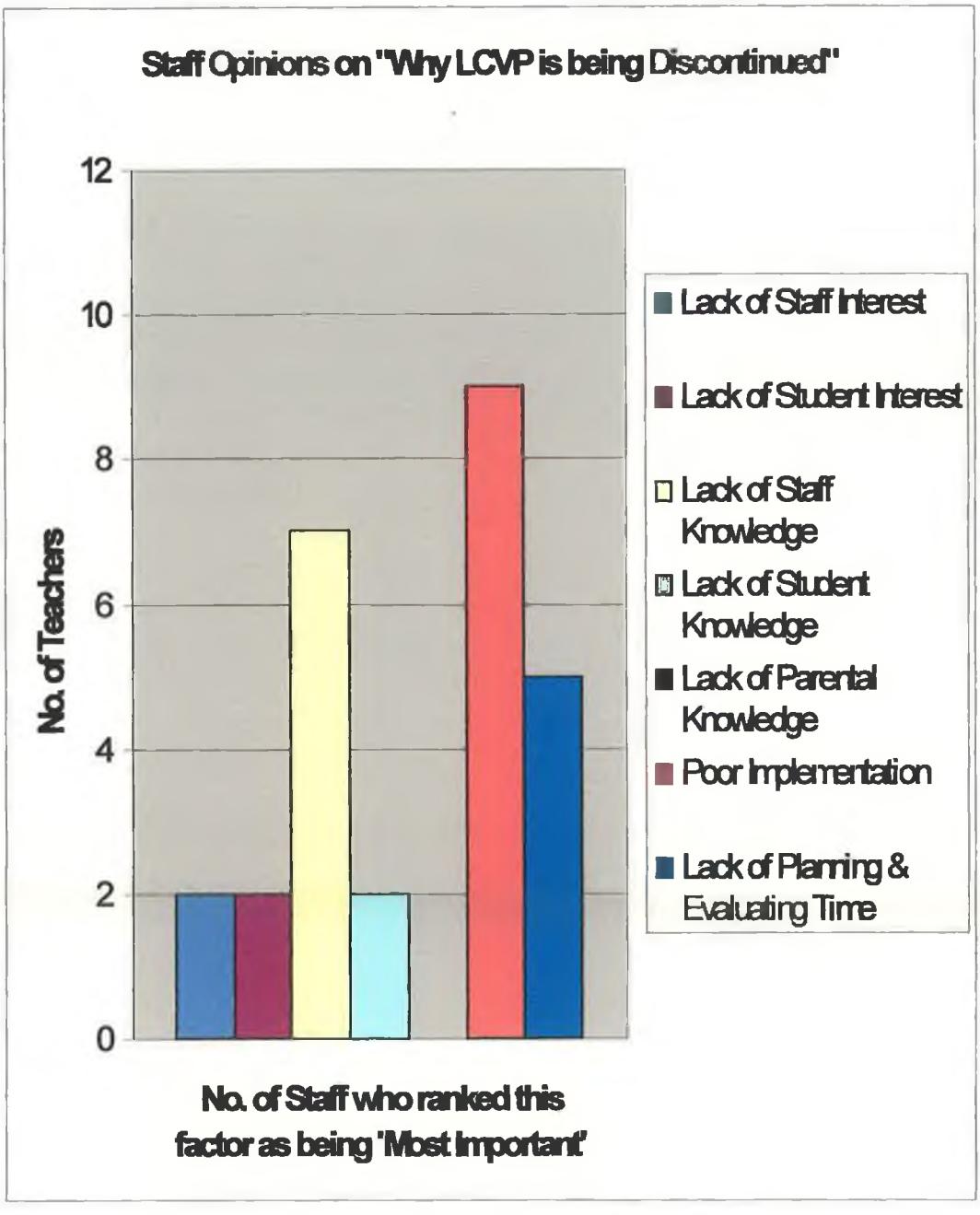


Poor implementation rated also as being very important with all 11 respondents putting it in the important to most important category.

- **A Lack of Planning and Evaluating Time**



- Lack of planning and evaluating time also seems to be influential as all 9 respondents put it in the important to most important category.


Staff Opinions on "Why LCVP is being Discontinued"
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
No. of Teachers
Lack of Staff Interest
Lack of Student Interest
Lack of Staff Knowledge
Lack of Student Knowledge
Lack of Parental Knowledge
Poor Implementation
Lack of Planning & Evaluating Time
No. of Staff who ranked this factor as being 'Most Important'

Question 15 asked teachers to select from a list the way in which they became involved in the LCVP. This question was designed to find out the extent of consultation and communication that had taken place between teachers and the management involved in the running of the programme.

Question 15

Please tick the sentence that indicates how you became involved in the LCVP

- **It was my choice to become part of the LCVP teaching team**
- **I was allocated LCVP classes after consultation with management**
- **I was allocated LCVP classes without consultation with management**
- **Other**

10 teachers stated that they were allocated LCVP classes without consultation with management.

2 were allocated LCVP classes after consultation with management.

It is evident therefore that teachers believe that management had not made a sufficiently serious effort to consult with teachers in relation to the LCVP class.

Question 16 asked teachers to identify difficulties they believe occurred after the introduction of the LCVP in the school.

Question 16

In your opinion what difficulties, if any, have arisen since the introduction of the programme which were not anticipated

A number of difficulties were reported so I will list them all.

- Three respondents commented on how the LCVP class was established as a base class and 'corralled' as one unit. This has caused a shared sense of separateness to develop between students of the LCVP and the established LC. They are removed from the school community.
- One teacher commented on the lack of use of the computer room and access to resources especially for the Link Modules has been problematic.
- One teacher commented on how in-service should have been offered in the first year of teaching the programme not in the second year when the students were in their exam year. As a result I (the teacher) did not realise so many outside visits were needed for the Link Modules.

- Two respondents commented on the general apathy or 'ignorance' about the LCVP. Also a lack of guidance and a poor choice of candidates. They were generally all weak students and would have been more suited to the LCA.
- Two respondents commented on the fact that it was generally perceived as a programme for weaker students which it is not. As a result of these weaker students been segregated as a base class some discipline problems have occurred leading to a lack of enthusiasm among staff.
- One respondent commented on the lack of knowledge of the structure of the year, with regard to assessment requirements for example and the completion of portfolios has been problematic.
- Two respondents commented on the way the LCVP has become a home for "demoralised underachievers", thus undermining the programme for less able but hard working students.

Question 17 asked teachers to name any internal or external bodies they believe were beneficial in the running of the LCVP, in order to examine the extent that the school went to in order to establish and maintain the programme.

Question 17

Are there any particular forms of support, internally or externally, that have be used and been beneficial in the running of the programme?

3 of the teachers named external bodies of support that they had experience of. They included:

a) LCVP co-ordinator of another local school was helpful in advising on the completion of elements of the Link Modules.

b) In-service training in the Kildare Education Centre, was recorded as being "excellent" by teacher X.

c) Teachers on the staff who have connections or knowledge of local businesses proved very helpful with the "Enterprise Education" Link Module.

The other 9 respondents believed there were no forms of support, internal or external, that have been used in the running of the programme.

Question 18 asked teachers to give some general advice that would give to other schools in relation to implementing new curricular innovations at school level.

Question 18

What advice would you give to a school which is starting LCVP?

The 12 respondents offered a lot of advice to other schools that may in the future be considering implementing a new programme such as the LCVP:

- One respondent advised that we should strive to get all staff involved and make *all* staff aware of the programme and what it entails, .e.g. what are the differences between the established LC and the LCVP.
- One respondent said school management should allow time for meetings to plan, monitor advice and discuss the new innovation.
- One respondent believed that teachers should actively promote the programme highlighting what it is and who it is for. Efforts should be made to sell it well because it is a very good programme.
- One respondent highlighted how teachers should form networks with outside agencies where possible.
- One respondent commented that the staff should know clearly what role they play in the implementation of the programme in the school, collegiality and collaboration should be encouraged.
- One respondent commented with regard to Enterprise and Careers. This teacher stated "I had 2 periods a week in 5th year and only 1 in 6th year and I was able to give that period over to the Link Modules, which was an excellent idea, schools should adapt the programme for their specific needs".
- One respondent believed that "it's vital for the success of the programme that the selection of the students is correct". Therefore planning is needed. There must be an adequate mix of student types and abilities to avoid forming a "ghettoised" class.
- Two respondents believed that the choice of the co-ordinator is important. Ensure they are enthusiastic, organised and on top of their work load.
- One respondent outlined how it was important for Enterprise teachers to have access to a computer room for reports. She also highlighted the fact

that local business participation is essential. A list of businesses to visit or who are willing to come into the school would be very helpful.

- One respondent believed it essential to talk to other schools with experience of such innovations.
- One respondent believed that the school should have a detailed plan for the 2 years of the programme.

Question 19 sought to get teachers feedback on the role of in school evaluation of new programmes such as the LCVP.

Question 19

The Department of Education and Science recommends that new programmes such as the LCVP should be evaluated in a systematic way. To what extent has such taken place with regard to the named programme in the school?

3 of the teachers believed there was a moderate amount of in school evaluation of the programme but 9 of the respondents reported that there was little or no evaluation undertaken.

Question 20 sought to establish if the services of the LCVP Support Team were used when it was established that problems were developing at school level for the newly implemented LCVP.

Question 20

To your knowledge, have you availed of the services of the LCVP Support Service to try and address any of the problems that have arisen?

2 teachers had used the services of the LCVP Support service, but both these teachers were involved in the Link Modules. They specified that these services were particularly helpful with regard to report writing and such topics.

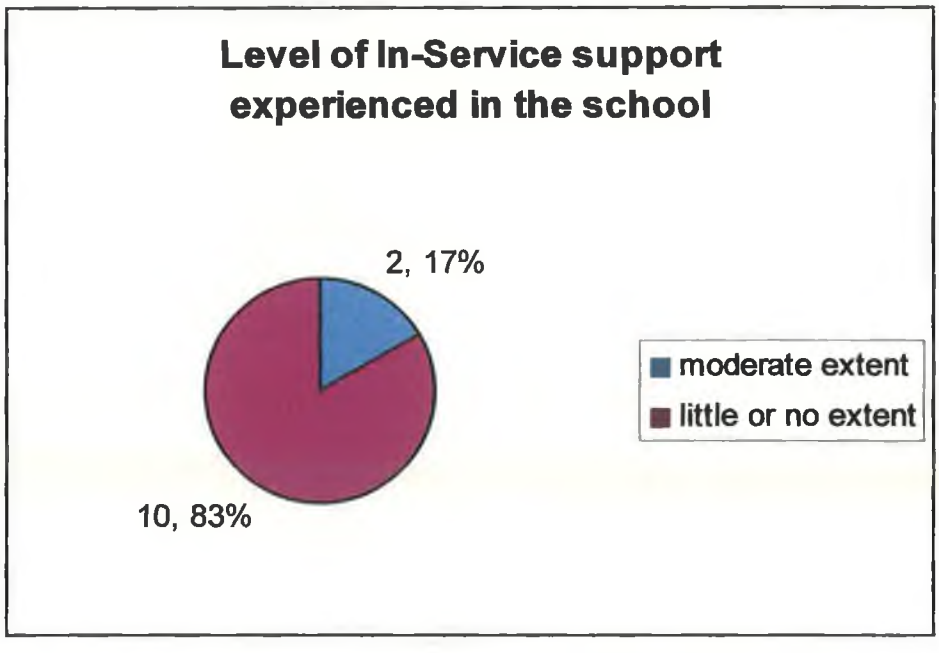
Questions 21 & 22 asked the teachers for their opinions on the extent to which in service training had been a feature in the schools implementation plan.

Question 21

In-service training is another important feature that the Department of Education and Science emphasises when implementing new programmes at school level.

To what extent has such in-service been a feature in this school's LCVP?

Again the 2 teachers involved in the Link Modules commented favourably on the in-service they had received. The other 10 respondents reported that little or no in-service had been experienced by them.



Question 22

If you did not receive in-service training, which areas would you like some training in?

The main areas that were reported in relation to training included the following:

- The structure of the programme in relation to criterea and assessment requirements. If all teachers are to promote the programme they should be knowledgeable about it so that students can easily access information about such innovations.

- Schools should be advised on the best ways of implementing such innovations with specific note been given to the assets of the programme to the students involved.

Conclusion

The findings of the teacher questionnaire yielded a large amount of data pertinent to the research questions. The next stage of the research is the focus group discussion with the teachers and an interview with the school's LCVP co-ordinator in order to seek further information on the pertinent issues. The information gained from the respondents through the questionnaires informed the author in drawing up the discussion and interview schedules.

Part B: Findings from the Focus Group Discussion

This section of the chapter presents the findings from the qualitative data derived from the focus group discussion that took place with 9 of the teachers involved in the LCVP in the school. Initially there were to be 12 teachers involved in this session but 2 of the teachers were sick on the designated day and the other teacher could not attend because she was responsible for organising the orals in the school and such duties demanded her attention on the day in question. One discussion session was held and it was guided by a list of questions that I wanted to explore further. The exact wording or order of the questions was not predetermined but developed in response to the discussion situation. The discussion schedule was given to the candidates a week prior to the meeting. The findings from the initial teacher questionnaire and the interview with the LCVP co-ordinator formed the basis for this discussion. Through the focus group discussion I wanted to collect perspectives in greater depth and all teachers involved agreed they would be more comfortable having a semi-structured discussion as opposed to being interviewed alone. A dictaphone was used with the permission of all participants to record the meeting.

The following areas were selected as appropriate areas of study in order to probe in more depth issues that had arisen from the questionnaires and the interview with the LCVP co-ordinator.

1. The relevance and role that in-service education had played for teachers of the Link Modules.
2. Cross-curricular and inter disciplinary aspects of the LCVP.
3. Issues related to the rationale of the LCVP and the extent to which it was realised in the school.
4. Issues relating to difficulties that had arisen in the life of the LCVP in the school and possible solutions to these.

I will present the findings of the discussion in the form of an edited transcript, highlighting areas and comments that proved particularly noteworthy for the study.

Questions 1-4 sought to identify the subject cohort of the teachers been interviewed, the length of their experience in relation to the LCVP and the process that was undertaken to obtain their involvement. I will not present the findings of these basic questions here because they are clearly stated in the findings of the questionnaire (Chapter 5, Part A). These questions served to nevertheless make the candidates feel at ease in the context of the discussion.

Questions 5-8 were only relevant to the 2 teachers of the LCVP Link Modules. These questions sought to establish their opinions on the in-service training they received in terms of its overall quality and to determine its relevance to the programme in question.

Question 5

Did you attend in-service training before starting to teach this programme?

Teacher X ("World of Work" Module teacher) reported "I attended in service for 2 days in the Kildare Education Centre. It was very informative mainly because it was delivered by LCVP teachers. The only drawback was that I did not receive the in-service before starting to teach the module. It was after Christmas in my first year of teaching the Link Module before I had signed up for any sort of in-service".

Teacher Y ("Enterprise" Module Teacher) reported that "It was my first year in the school when I started teaching this module. I had no prior experience of the LCVP, I did not really know what it was about at all. I did not mind so much though because I was a business teacher and had some experience of setting up mini companies and the like, having taught in the Transition Year programme in my previous school. I did not receive any formal in service in relation to the enterprise module until after Christmas in my second year of teaching the enterprise module, so my students at that stage would have been in 6th year".

Question 6

To what extent did you benefit from the in-service training?

Teacher X: "I'm teaching the "World of Work" module but the fact that I had no in-service training before teaching the module did not daunt me too much because

I also teach Careers in the school. However when I did get some formal in-service what I found most useful was the workshop on the portfolios. I got to see a finished portfolio and they clearly went through the marking scheme, outlining specifically what was expected of the students. This aspect of the in service served to give me more confidence going back to school. I also found it very useful because they gave us a prepared timeframe, therefore breaking down the tasks into manageable pieces".

Teacher Y: "When I did get some in-service I found it useful but really for me it was too late. It definitely should have been offered in the first year of teaching the programme, not in the second year when the students were in their exam year. I did not realise so many outside visits were needed for the link modules, and learning such so late in the year did not help my stress levels".

Question 7

To what extent did the in-service training prepare you to start teaching the LCVP Link Modules with confidence?

Teacher X: "My in service did not prepare me at all for teaching the LCVP because I did not receive it until after I started teaching the module. Having said that, it was good when it came but I would not have liked to have been in the position of teacher Y. I think if I hadn't received any in service training before the end of 5th year I would have opted out of the programme. I could not have coped with being so in the dark in terms of what was expected of me or my students. It would not have been good for my mental health and the students would have suffered as a result".

Teacher Y commented: "I actually called on the help of the LCVP support services because I felt out on a limb. I have to say they were excellent and most helpful. They sent all sort of literature out to me in the school and arranged for one of their team to come out to the school and give some guidance. It was a welcome gesture, believe me". They specified what was involved in the reports the students had to write up and gave me the confidence to see the project through. The mini company didn't go to well, but that wasn't the be all and end all of things. Once the students could write up an objective report outlining their objectives and making recommendations for future projects it would be fine".

Question 8

How do you feel about the content of the Link Modules for the LCVP?

Teacher X felt "the module on the "World of Work" is generally very good. I think it's great for students to undertake tasks such as career investigation, work experience whilst also composing a proper Curriculum Vitae. What's even better is that they get points for completing tasks that every student of their age should be doing. It would be great if it could be built into the structure of the established LC".

Teacher Y felt "it's a good module and is very worthwhile, the only problem I have is with time. There never seems to be enough of it and a fair amount of work must be done outside of class time, especially in relation to the mini company in the initial stages. It is also very important that students have access to computers for this module. This proved to be a problem for me in Year 1, because we were not timetabled for any time in the computer room, but this year things seem to be working out okay".

Question 9 was directed at all the teachers present at the discussion. It sought to establish their personal attitudes to the LCVP in the school. From the questionnaire it was clear that there was some negativity toward the LCVP programme and I wanted to establish the extent of this and to examine the reasons for it.

Question 9

Do you enjoy teaching the programme? Why/ Why not?

Generally the teachers did not find teaching the LCVP any different to teaching the established LC. The only problem was that the LCVP class were quite difficult to teach because the base class was composed of 19 students of lower academic ability.

Teacher A had the LCVP for media studies and reported "They are the most difficult group of students to teach. They make no effort and seem to have resigned themselves to the fact that they are not that bright anyway so why should they bother trying".

Teacher B: "It's probably our fault that they are so difficult to teach because we segregated them and labelled them in a way. Individually the girls are fine but collectively they are not the nicest group of students. I know we had to establish them as a base class because of timetable constraints, but I know of LCVP classes in other schools and they are not established as base classes. It makes no sense to me".

Teacher C: "I only have a few of the LCVP girls in my English class, you would not even know they were LCVP students". I probed this answer in more detail because it was becoming apparent that the teachers had labelled the LCVP students as being different to the other students and they had not even realised it. Teacher C went on to say: "what I meant was they are not disruptive, or weak, they actually work quite hard. I suppose thinking about it now that you have pointed that out, I would associate LCVP with less able students, I always thought that was the case". Generally the teachers involved in the discussion group were not overly fond of teaching the LCVP students. The fact that they were grouped together for most subjects, meant that they had been labelled as a group of "difficult underachievers" to teach.

Questions 10-12 aimed to examine the extent to which teachers were aware of the goings on in other subject areas. It attempted to establish the extent of teacher collaboration that was taking place in the school.

Question 10

Are you aware of what is going on in other subjects of the LCVP? Is it important to be aware?

The general consensus was that teachers were not really aware of what was going on in other subjects. They did not feel that this was very important and teacher C commented "sure where would we get the time to see what was going on in other subjects, we have enough to contend with in our own subject areas".

Question 11

Do you actively try to integrate with other subjects?

The teachers questioned generally felt that there was no need to try and integrate with other subjects. Teacher E: "In an ideal world it would be great to sit down and see what X is doing in her class, but we are not teaching in an ideal world. Time is of the essence and at the end of the day you have an extensive course to complete".

Teacher G: "It would be good to integrate because it might actually cut our workloads down. You'll often find as you are covering a topic with the students that they will then inform you, 'oh but we have already done this in Mrs. X's class'. It's no good to you finding out at that stage however. Maybe we could do something about this at the start of the year when we have our subject meetings".

Question 12

Do you include any of the following teaching methodologies in your delivery of the programme:

- **Practical work**
- **Group work**
- **Integrated projects with other areas**
- **Class discussion**
- **Research**

Teacher X: "In my module on the "World of Work" there would be a fair amount of research involved especially when students are doing their career investigations. There is a lot of practical work too in that they have to present their investigations and other tasks in a typed format, so we spend quite a bit of time in the computer room"

Teacher Y: "In the "Enterprise" module there is a combination of research, practical work, group work and class discussion in relation to the mini company. I enjoy these aspects of the module but they are a difficult group to undertake these tasks with. At the best of times it's just not feasible to carry out class discussions because discipline suffers, so you really have to pick your time carefully. In saying that, this 6th year group are much easier to deal with compared with last year's lot".

Because of the group dynamic among the LCVP students, the teachers interviewed reported that it was not really feasible to alter one's teaching methodologies. Although LCVP aims to develop a more vocational approach to learning, with the emphasis on the students taking more responsibility of their learning, this is not the case in the school for teachers that are teaching them as a base class. This problem of the students been identified as a homogenous group of "weaker" students was identified by one of the teachers as being a key reason in their opinion for the failure of the LCVP in the school. Teacher C: "From the word go, the LCVP has failed to take off. Teachers have no idea of its structure or assessment requirements. All we seem to hear is that the students are difficult to teach. It does not seem to get any good press in the school and from the start the teachers have been kept at a distance from it. We were never given any opportunity to get involved and at this stage it's too late. It would probably be better if we scrapped the whole idea for a couple of years and restarted it afresh and more prepared".

Questions 13-14 tried to rate the extent to which teachers understood the rationale of the LCVP, because it was clear form the teacher questionnaires that there was a general lack of understanding of this. Any opinions that were issued in relation to the rationale had to be explained fully.

Question 13

Do you feel there is a need for the LCVP in the school? why, why not?

The teachers indicated that there was a definite need for LCVP in the school. They all agreed that "vocational education" is a must for life in today's world, especially in relation to preparation for the world of work, college and life in general.

The teachers in their questionnaires highlighted the fact that they believed it was a beneficial programme to have in the school because it would accommodate the "less able" students. I briefly explained the aim of the LCVP to the teachers and they were very shocked to hear that it is *not* designed as a programme for the less able. However they did feel the type of assessment it was introducing into the senior cycle was noteworthy. Teacher D: "The presence of project-based

assessment in addition to purely terminal assessment is a great advancement, the other is just so cut throat". Teacher E then commented "sure if it's not for the academically less able why is there not a wider student cohort doing it?" Teacher A: "Maybe if we marketed it better we would get a better take-up for the programme, How are the students selected for LCVP?" Teacher G: "We need to know as a school what the programme is about. Unless you're involved it does not really bother you whether you know what's going on or not, but from what I have heard it seems to be a good programme".

Question 14

To what extent do you believe the rationale of the LCVP to accommodate a wider academic cohort of students was realised in the school? Give reasons for your answer.

In the results of the questionnaire 58% of the respondents believed the rationale was realised in the school to a moderate extent with the other 42% feeling the rationale was not realised. When probed on this result teacher B commented: "Sure how could it have been realised if we did not know what the LCVP was really about?" It seemed to be that the group accepted their own lack of understanding of aspects of the LCVP. They were however very positive and believed that "given half the chance, if we were to start over I have no doubt that the implementation of the LCVP would be more successful because you would get everybody involved, including the students and you'd give the programme a new lease of life in the school".

Teacher G: "We have a very committed staff here and I have no doubt that they would push the programme if they understood what it entailed and the benefits it has for the students". Teacher C: "We need to make sure that the staff are given an opportunity to explore the programme and plan its implementation, assessing its suitability for our girls". Teacher X: "It is not really our fault that the LCVP has not been a great success in the school because we were given very little guidance in relation to it. We got no induction to it, there appears to have been no monitoring, no advising generally no real leadership". Teacher E: "Its wrong that it was used as a programme for weaker students". Teacher Y: "We need to give this issue some time at the next staff meeting especially if it's at risk of being

discontinued, sure we have not had a chance to get involved and the whole things might be grinding to a halt. We should have been consulted at some stage".

Questions 15-16 sought to identify problems that the teachers believed were hindering the implementation of the LCVP in the school. These questions also sought to establish possible solutions the teachers had in relation to these problems.

Question 15

What difficulties, if any, have arisen since the introduction of the programme which where not anticipated in your opinion?

After establishing the fact that the teachers interviewed did not really ever understand the rationale for the LCVP, the focus group highlighted a number of difficulties that they believed hindered the successful implementation of the LCVP in the school. They generally echoed the difficulties they had mentioned in the questionnaires but the difficulties mentioned to day were felt with more conviction. Teacher X felt, "the fact the girls were assembled as a base class really meant from the outset that the LCVP was doomed to problems because the students who were in the class were unsuitable in hindsight. The fact that they were separate form the other girls also caused problems. It's as if a self-fulfilling prophecy took over, they saw themselves as being less able, they became less able, discipline problems followed, teachers became dubious of the LCVP and associated it with problems and then the other students saw it as a programme for the less able". Teacher B: "Because we were never consulted about the programme and we had no real knowledge in relation to it, I guess we were never that bothered about the LCVP, and students probably picked up on this lack of interest, I am not saying its our fault but we should have been given some opportunity as a collective staff to address some of the problems that our colleagues had to face every day. Our general ignorance and apathy, in addition to poor guidance, meant the LCVP was really never given a fair chance in the school and the students are the main ones that will loose out". Teacher X also reported how there was "not enough staff consultation or involvement, there was

never talk of LCVP at staff meetings as far as I can remember, it seems marginalised".

In general, the respondents believe the difficulties experienced in relation to the LCVP in the school arose from a general lack of knowledge about the programme, in terms of its structure and assessment requirements. As teacher D pointed out: "Our internal interpretation of the LCVP and how it should be run and structured has caused a lot of the problems we have had. As such, many of them probably could have been avoided".

Question 16

Is there anything that could be done to help revive the programme at school level?

A large number of issues were raised in pursuing this question with the focus group. These issues are paraphrased as follows:

- In-service training needs to be provided specifically for teachers of the Link Modules *before* they start teaching them. In addition, part of a staff day should be set aside for the whole staff to receive some sort of brief on the LCVP in terms of its structure, assessment criteria and benefits.
- Extra time should be set aside maybe as part of the school plan to facilitate such curricular innovations. Specific attention could be given to the implementation of such programmes.
- The establishment of a core team who would be responsible for researching, evaluating, monitoring and liaising with staff and students. They could be the driving force behind such an innovation.
- At every staff meeting the LCVP co-ordinator should be given an opportunity to give feedback to the staff in relation to progress or difficulties that are being encountered.
- The LCVP should be re marketed and a wider cohort of students should be encouraged to undertake it, it should loose its image as being a programme for the less able.

Conclusion

The discussion with the nine teachers was most enlightening for this research study. The difficulties attending the process of implementation became clearer both to the researcher and the teachers being interviewed as the focus group discussion progressed. After the discussion teachers also seemed more committed to implementing the LCVP more effectively the next time. The fact that they believed there will be a next time was rewarding.

Part C: Findings from the Interview with the LCVP Coordinator

This part of the chapter presents the findings from the interview with the LCVP co-ordinator. One interview was held and the interview schedule was given to the interviewee a week prior to the interview. The LCVP co-ordinator was interviewed in order to provide necessary additional perspectives to those gathered from the teachers through the questionnaires and the focus group. The LCVP co-ordinator, holds a permanent whole time position in the school and has been teaching for the past 40 years. His appointment as LCVP co-ordinator 3 years ago was part fulfilment of his A post, entitled "Curricular Development".

The following areas were selected for investigation in the interview with the co-ordinator.

1. Processes engaged in prior to offering the programme in the study school (Among staff, students & parents)
2. The extent to which the rationale of the LCVP was attained in the study school and difficulties that were encountered.
3. Processes engaged in during the running of the programme, in relation to student grouping, teacher involvement, and decisions to discontinue the programme.
4. Forms of support (internally & externally) that were used in the running of the programme at school level.
5. Advice that should be given to schools in their endeavours of curricular implementation at school level.

The co-ordinator provided answers to all of the above questions. I will present his interview in the form of an edited transcript, because whilst the information he provided is very important not all of it is central to the main research questions of this study. The LCVP co-ordinator of the school has approved the transcript to be a true and accurate account of his interview.

How long have you been coordinator for LCVP

"I have been LCVP co-ordinator for the past 3 years and I have been the only person to hold this post in this newly constituted Community School".

How were you chosen as coordinator?

Asked by the principal /took on duties as part of a post of responsibility (A or B post)/ Elected by staff members / assumed the role voluntarily.

"I got the post as part of my 'A post', which is titled "Curriculum Development".

What process was engaged in at school level in deciding to offer the programme initially?

"It was actually the Principal in the old school who initiated the interest in the programme because she believed it would be a major benefit to offer such a programme in the new school. LCA was not an option. Then when the new Principal was appointed she continued to show an interest in the LCVP. Generally it was looked at for a period of 2 years before it was actually offered to students in our new school. During this time the principal and I as pending LCVP co-ordinator visited local schools that were offering the programme and spoke to them about it. One of these Principals also visited the staff just before our school changed location and became a Community School. He informed staff of the benefits of the programme for teachers and students, outlining its structure and assessment arrangements. After that it was 2 years before it was offered in our school, so that would be 2001. Basically the initial decision to offer the programme was instigated by the Principal and I gave her my full support. She (the Principal) also decided that we would not include the whole staff in this decision at this stage. Therefore you could say there was no consultation. She believed it was best to get it up and running first and then we would get the staff on board. The LCVP Support Service also came to the school to talk to myself and the principal therefore I do think our preparation was quite good except for the fact that it was out of sight of the staff. Her main reason for offering the programme was because she believed it would be a good programme to be able to offer to the "less able" students in the school".

Did you receive any in service training in relation to co coordinating the LCVP programme before offering it in the school?

"Before the programme was launched in the school I received in-service training from the LCVP Support Services in the Kildare Education Centre. I would rate it as "excellent" and very relevant to the programme".

Was there any parental participation in the initial decision to offer the programme?

"Being honest no parental participation took place with regard to offering the programme initially *but* parents of all students going into senior cycle (pending 5th years) were invited to an "information night" in the school in relation specifically to LCVP. I myself organised and delivered the night".

What do you think is the most important single support needed to run a successful LCVP and why?

"I feel the most important support needed to run the LCVP in the school is the timetable. It needs be flexible enough to facilitate the Link Modules which need 3 periods a week. This can prove very difficult to accommodate. Some schools sacrifice subjects like religion in the timetable, which is wrong in my opinion, others fit in the Link Modules by offering 35 minute periods in the afternoon. Basically the timetable has to be manipulated a little".

Do you believe there is a need for LCVP in the school?

"Definitely, there is a need for the LCVP in the school. However it must not be seen as a programme for the less able students, like it is at present among both the staff and students in the school. Although the students who undertake the programme complete fewer subjects than those following the course of the established Leaving Certificate, the work-load is in fact greater for the LCVP student. Therefore we should be trying to get diligent, well-motivated students to undertake this programme. I would say that ¾ of all schools offer LCVP to their students. But we should not offer it just to have something there for the less able students, because if you look back on past academic records for the school, even students we would rate as less academic did well in the established Leaving Certificate. They are always well looked after, I have no doubt about that.

Therefore there is a definite need for LCVP but in future we must try and appeal to all students in terms of academic ability. LCVP is not an easy option".

To what extent do you believe the rationale of the LCVP to accommodate a wider academic cohort of students was realised in the school? If not, why not?

"In hindsight I don't think that the rationale of the LCVP was realised in the school at all because the overall aim of the LCVP was not appreciated. As it happens the students who took part in the programme were the "less able" ones of a mixed ability group. They would have been considered the lowest stream in terms of academic ability".

What difficulties, if any, have arisen since the introduction of the programme which were not anticipated in your opinion?

"The main difficulties that were experienced in the school in my opinion were having to put students together as a base class. This only happened because of constraints with the timetable. Teachers must understand it was not a deliberate action on my part and I think that is the general consensus among the staff. In addition to this, only the less able students actually applied to do the programme. I think other students believed it was below their academic ability so they did not bother even finding out about the programme, which is a pity. As the first year of the programme progressed and difficulties intensified, management's support of the programme did dwindle. I would say that it has proved difficult because of the type of student that signed up for the programme".

Who is involved in making the following curriculum decisions for the LCVP?

- **What students take part in the programme**

"In terms of how students were selected for the course, they were actually self-selected, they all put themselves forward. Then they were interviewed by me to establish their suitability to the programme".

- **Why was it decided to keep LCVP students in a base class setting for all subjects**

"Decisions regarding the organisation of students were influenced by the construction of the timetable, which is in fact decided on by management. These

were the constraints I had to work within so there was nothing that could be done. It must be noted however that they were not together for all their subjects. They were together for religion, careers, speech and drama, media, ECDL and PE. As it happens, the majority of them ended up in the same Irish class but that was the result of something else, it was basically accidental. I think because of this that the staff thought they were together for everything. This actually is not the case. There was no decision made to keep them all together it just ended up that way. But we are also caught because the only way we can really offer the programme is if the group are a base class. We just need to get a wider cohort of students to apply in future".

- **Decisions regarding the offering of this curricular innovation**

"The decision to offer the LCVP in the first place was down to the Principal of the old school. The new principal continued the interest in it and then we both went about implementing it in the school. This was part of my post of "Curriculum Development".

- **Decisions regarding what teachers would be involved in teaching the programme (the link modules). Were these teachers given a choice?**

"Decisions regarding what teachers would be involved in the programme were generally dictated by the timetable. I am not really sure how teachers were selected. I am sure the Principal mentioned it to them at their annual review but I can't really comment on it. I am sure however that one of the Link Module teachers was consulted about teaching the programme. Again I don't know about the others".

To what extent does the school management support the LCVP programme?

"At present I don't think they hold any support for the programme. It has a very poor image among both students and staff and it has been more problematic than anticipated; a lot of the staff believe this is because of the cohort of students that got involved in the first place and they are probably right because they would not have been the easiest to teach. They were definitely less academic and therefore harder to motivate. But management were very supportive of it, they just don't want it to continue in its present format".

Have you been involved in the school decision to cease the LCVP programme? Why do you think the LCVP is being ceased in the school?

"I have to say that despite what people think that the LCVP is in fact not being discontinued in the school, its only been ceased temporarily because only 3 students applied to take part in the programme for September 2004. On seeing the poor response from students to undertake this programme I was anxious to push the programme with the current 3rd years by revisiting the classes again but management (the Principal) thought it best to let it go for this year and plan better for next year. We have to come up with a plan of how we are going to get it across to students that it is not a programme for the less academic as they believe. Therefore discontinuation as far as I am concerned, is only temporary. Maybe in the future we could put the idea of curricular development into the school plan, we could form a committee and then try and re-launch the programme among students and staff. But if we are going to have it as part of the school plan it's essential to have time set aside in school time for planning and development".

Are there any forms of support internally or externally (LCVP support team) that have been used and been beneficial in the running of the programme or in trying to revive it? If so, what are the most important of these?

"I have been in touch with the LCVP Support Services and I have to say I have found them excellent throughout the time that we were offering the programme. No, they have not been involved in the school's decision to cease the programme and their help had not been sought in order to try and revive the programme because it hasn't really been deemed necessary".

What advice would you give to a school which is starting LCVP?

"The advice I would give to anyone who is going to offer this wonderful innovation is to plan their timetable well and make sure it is flexible enough to accommodate the Link Modules. This has to be done, accommodating the Link Modules is paramount in the running of the programme".

Does the school have any contact with other schools in the area in relation to the LCVP? Would you welcome contact with other schools while planning and implementing the programme in your school?

"There used to be a good network of contact but it was more accidental than planned. Local guidance counsellors used to meet once a month and more often than not the LCVP co-ordinator was the guidance counsellor, so we often used to end up discussing elements of the LCVP programme in our respective schools. However in the last year and a half this has not happened at all. You would miss it and I would safely say that there is a definite need for such a network among schools in the locality. It would be nothing but beneficial".

Is the programme evaluated at school level? Who takes part in this evaluation

What from does the evaluation take?

"It has been informally evaluated between the co-ordinator and the Principal but it has never been evaluated by the staff or the students in a formal or planned session".

Conclusion

The interview with the LCVP Co-ordinator was most enlightening. The interviewee recognised the difficulties that the school encountered whilst implementing the LCVP but was confident in the fact that the next time the school tries implementing such a programme all of the staff will be involved and consulted from the outset. He acknowledged that one of the greatest obstacles in trying to implement any curricular development is manipulating the school's timetable to facilitate all, and also having the time to continuously plan, develop and evaluate the programme in question.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

Introduction

This chapter reviews the findings of the author's research and analyses these in the context of the research literature on educational reform. The research carried out for the dissertation looked specifically at the implementation of the LCVP at school level, concentrating on the perceptions of those actually implementing the programme and their personal attitudes to the implementation process. While external factors such as socio economic climate and context are influential, equally important are factors at school level. This point is made by Ivan Wallace (1987) who maintains that "Government, Board, Department, Inspectorate, Governors, Parents can inhibit or encourage, support or neglect; they can help create the conditions under which a ...school may better thrive, but they are not the school" (1987:15). As far back as 1931, A.N. Whitehead, commented that " the first requisite for educational reform is the school as a unit with its approved curriculum based on its own needs, and evolved by its own staff"(1931:39). For this reason, the perceptions and attitudes of teachers regarding implementation strategies and the factors affecting implementation are important. The project was undertaken in light of the current educational climate in which many new programmes are currently undergoing implementation in schools.

Aim of the dissertation restated:

The research focused on a number of components relating to the implementation of LCVP in the author's school. The aim of this research is to examine two interrelated themes, firstly investigating the implementation of the LCVP in a newly constituted school. Secondly in the light of findings from the research investigating the conditions deemed necessary for the successful implementation of such. By using the experience and reflections of teachers, and the evidence available from the review of the literature, I have attempted to identify the

practices and policies that support or hinder such implementation. It is hoped that this research will assist the author in reaching a better understanding of the process of implementation at school level especially in relation to teachers and the role they play in it. In the light of these findings, this dissertation aims to isolate those factors teachers felt were most influential in encouraging successful implementation of the LCVP at school level. In addition it is hoped to identify aspects that might prove beneficial to school management in their future endeavours to implement new curricular innovations.

Factors affecting Implementation

a) Factors Local and National, Internal and External

The needs of schools during implementation can be grouped under a number of headings according to the LCVP Support Service (DES, 1999:15). These are funding, resource materials, time, staff development, programme evaluation and student needs. The primary research part of this thesis shows that teachers' attitudes towards the LCVP are generally positive in the school. 100% of the teacher respondents believed there was a need for LCVP in the school. They outlined a number of reasons for thinking this, but the general consensus was that vocational education is a must for life in today's world, especially in relation to preparation for the world of work, college and life in general. The presence of project-based assessment in addition to purely terminal assessment was also favourably noted. The LCVP co-ordinator also believed there "is a definite need for the LCVP in the school".

However despite these positive feelings there appear to be shortcomings in the school. Concerns of the teachers interviewed include shortfalls in DES support in the form of extra time for planning, curriculum assistance, and in-service training. The teachers highlighted a number of factors both nationally and locally which they believed influenced programme implementation. They are as follows:

Factors Affecting at National Level

1. Lack of DES support in the form of:
   - In-service training
   - Time for planning
   - Curriculum development assistance

Factors Affecting at Local Level

1. Pupil perception of the programme
2. Support of the Principal
3. Teacher motivation
4. Teamwork among staff members
5. Willingness of staff to change
6. Support of parents
7. Lack of
   - In-service training
   - Planning time
   - Resources

Pursuing the local factors in greater detail, it became clear that the interviewed teachers believe that a combination of internal and external influences, are necessary for the successful implementation of a programme at school level. In relation to internal factors the following were mentioned: "pupil perception of the programme", "support of the principal", "teacher motivation", "support of parents", "willingness of staff to change" and "teamwork among staff members". The four external factors mentioned were "in-service", "DES Support", "evaluation time" and "resources". Generally lack of planning time, funding and in-service training and parental involvement were the main aspects which teachers believed acted against the implementation process.

The factors rated by the LCVP co-ordinator in his interview are a little different and reflect their different perspectives on the implementation process. In the case of the co-ordinator, he rated the external factors as highly as the internal factors, but for teachers it appears that the internal factors are more important. In their role, co-ordinators depend highly on both internal, staff related factors and external factors acting at school level. He rated "timetabling", "teamwork among

the staff", "support of the principal" and "curriculum development assistance" as being most important. He also mentioned the "support of parents" and "teacher motivation". The external factors, he identified were the provision of "curriculum development assistance", "resources", "funding", "in-service training" and "extra time for planning".

Calls for extra planning time was a predominant answer in the focus group discussion, suggesting that time is a resource in short supply and yet essential for successful implementation. None of these factors can be treated in isolation and providing all of them would not necessarily ensure successful implementation. Many of these factors are affected by additional factors. Generally it is clear that factors built into the culture of the school are regarded as quite influential in the implementation process.

b) In-Service

The teachers who received in-service training in the Kildare Education Centre did report it as being very useful. Before the programme was launched in the school both the co-ordinator and the two teachers involved in the link modules received in-service training. They rated it as "excellent and very relevant to the programme". But of the 12 teachers questioned 10 of them had never had any formal in-service in relation to the LCVP. They felt in-service was badly needed in areas such as, the structure of the LCVP and assessment requirements. Teacher X commented on how "in-service should have been offered in the first year of teaching the programme not in the second year when the students were in their exam year. As a result I (the teacher) did not realise so many outside visits were needed for the Link Modules". Generally the teachers questioned felt it would facilitate them in promoting the programme at school level. If all teachers are to promote the programme they should be knowledgeable about it so that students can easily access information about such innovations. They also felt that schools should be advised on the best ways of implementing such innovations with specific note been given to the assets of the programme for the students involved. The LCVP Support Service do have a service of development officers whom have "proved most effective over the last number of years in promoting awareness among staff". These visits should be an integral part of any schools

implementation plan and they serve to motivate staff according to the LCVP Support Service, (DES, 1999:31). Generally the areas that were reported as being important by the respondents could have been easily addressed in a workshop or whole staff briefing. This is just one of a range of school based supports that the LCVP Support Service actually offer.

C) Contact with other Schools

The teachers also feel that contact with other schools would be beneficial. This is recommended by Granville (1999) in his evaluation of 'LCVP in-career development programme', where he advocates "the development of a network of local school clusters...aimed at initiating and maintaining local developments in work related learning" (1999:6). The results of this study generally suggest that there is a need for the programme in the school. Despite the difficulties around the teachers still feel positive about the programme. Their demands for more time for planning, training and evaluation are supported by the evaluation carried out by Granville (1999). Throughout the report it is stressed that the forms of support needed in implementing a new course are time, resources and in-service training.

To address some of these issues Granville (1999:6) in his evaluation of the LCVP believes that "whole school planning arrangements should be utilised to enhance the awareness of LCVP...and to promote further the status of LCVP with school staffs, students and parents". With regard to some of these shortcomings the LCVP Support Service (DES, 1999:12) have made recommendations. They have encouraged principals to take responsibilities around the issue of funding, the release of staff for in-service in addition to the provision of co-ordination and planning time. They have also advocated the establishment of a 'planning group' (DES, 1999:12) to make sure that staff, students and parents are well informed in relation to the LCVP thus facilitating its successful implementation.

School Culture and the LCVP

From the research it is evident that a 'collaborative culture' is lacking in the school in relation to the LCVP and its implementation. The teachers questioned reported that there was "no induction, no monitoring, no advising or no real leadership" in relation to the LCVP. Teacher X reported how there was "not

enough staff consultation or involvement, there was never talk of LCVP at staff meetings as far as I can remember, it seems marginalised". Inadequate communications structures and insufficient meetings may have contributed to this. In the literature there is a general consensus that school culture affects change initiatives because "if structures change without changes in school culture the change is likely to be superficial and this is a danger with all externally generated reforms", (Stoll & Fink, 1996:41). Teaching has long been identified as a profession where people essentially work alone, isolated from colleagues, consumed largely by the immediate needs in their classrooms. But this type of individualistic culture resists educational innovation because as Fullan (1991) reports it does not encourage consultation or dialogue. Both of these factors allow a shared vision to develop whilst creating a sense of empowerment among the staff. The general feeling from the questionnaires is summed up in the following sentiment, "management imposed the decision on the school system and no consultation took place". Generally how the programme was initiated in the school is not how the LCVP Support Service would recommend. They recommend that as early as possible the principal should involve "members of staff in a planning group", (DES,1999:12). This facilitates consultation which allows "a shared vision to develop over time". For the change to have meaning "it's essential that the organizational atmosphere is conducive to participation and consultation", (Law & Glover 2000:125). Paradoxically, the success in developing a very good collaborative culture within the school may lead to LCVP teachers becoming "balkanised", and this is something we need to be aware of. Balkanisation separates teachers into isolated and often competing groups within a school. Sub cultures with specific agendas (Huberman, 1993) often evolve and these can prove a powerful barrier to whole school communication and collegiality. Balkanisation can also inhibit the responsiveness of teachers to outside innovations, because they may feel threatened by new programmes. Law & Glover (2000:125) stress the compartilisation of secondary education encourages balkanisation or at best only contrived collegiality generally because of things like, lack of time and the incompatibility of individuals.

The LCVP Support Service (1999) advise the establishment of a team approach in schools to combat such. Initially the team should be drawn from teachers of the

Link Modules, specialist teachers from vocational groupings, the guidance counsellor and teachers providing ICT access. The main aim of the team is to "encourage and facilitate inter staff co-operation and to promote the programme among staff" (DES, 1999:15). Generally the DES, in their evaluation carried out by the Inspectorate in 1999, believe that such provision promotes "team empowerment and ownership of the programme and this ultimately leads to a successful and dynamic programme", (DES, 1999:15). Collaborative work cultures foster and build upon qualities of openness, trust and support between teachers. This is very important on a programme like the LCVP because teachers will be able to learn from each other. However this type of culture does not just appear, it evolves and takes time.

Authority and responsibility should be devolved and leadership should try to create the environment in which continuous improvement can take place, (West Burnham, 1992). "Less effective schools tend to be characterised by less staff involvement in decision making in the school, less emphasis on formal staff meetings, less positive relations between management and staff and less supportive relations colleagues", (Smyth, 1999:224).

In conclusion Stoll and Fink (1995) refer to effective schools where people work together, respond to demands and developments, know where they are going and how to get there, (1995:85). Goals are regularly re-examined to ensure that they meet the needs of the pupils. Therefore the school culture influences the consultative process believed to be essential for successful implementation. School culture warrants particular focus in a study of the implementation of change as the culture of the school is one of the factors determining the successful implementation of curricular change. Hargreaves (1994) believes that if schools are to be effective in the future then cultures must be developed which simultaneously promote collegiality and individuality. Staff development should be constantly encouraged and there should be a genuine commitment on the part of management to the empowerment and development of staff and to supporting the professional culture of the school. As Fullan & Hargreaves (1996:93) point out "change takes place when members of a school community recognise…a need to change…and provided with shared process…establish a shared language…for

on going communication, research and professional interaction, a highly participatory structure…that incorporates all members…to support the process of change".

The Role of the Teacher

Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:22) state that "educational change that does not involve and is not supported by the teacher usually ends up as change for the worse or as no change at all". Generally all issues relating to the implementation of new programmes be they in relation to national or local implementation strategies have implications for teachers due to their involvement in all stages of the implementation process.

The evidence from this research study shows that 100% of the teachers questioned believe there is a need for LCVP in the school. The general consensus was that vocational education is a must for life in today's world, especially in relation to preparation for the world of work, college and life in general. However I do feel it is worth noting the lack of understanding among teachers about the actual rationale of the LCVP. There seems to be a general consensus that the LCVP is a programme for less academic students. 8 of the 12 respondents commented on how this alternative programme could facilitate certain students of differing abilities "who have learning difficulties and for whom the established Leaving Certificate would prove too difficult".

One respondent believed that "students are poorly served by the format, structures and academic pressure of the broad based established Leaving Certificate, but the LCVP addressed this to an extent". They felt "students deserved the opportunity to reach their Leaving Certificate through a less academic route". If teachers are expected to implement change and engage in new working relationships with their colleagues they need to be familiar with both the rationale and the methodology of the LCVP.

Generally these responses highlight a lack of understanding among the surveyed teachers about the LCVP, in terms of its overall format and assessment requirements. Therefore lack of adequate information and teacher training about the programme need to be addressed by school management. Both teacher

development and involvement is essential if changes are to be successful. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) found that "teachers are the ultimate key to educational change and improvement" (1992: ix) and Crooks contends that "the essence of curriculum change is development in teachers. Teachers are not just transmitters of knowledge. They selectively develop, define and interpret the curriculum" (1981:29). The respondents do feel that some of the difficulties being experienced in the LCVP are stemming from this general lack of knowledge about the programme in terms of its structure and requirements.

In addition to understanding the rationale behind the innovation, implementation also introduces demands on teachers in the sense that it involves them in school based curriculum development. This requires that teachers develop skills in programme planning, implementation and evaluation. Implementing a school based programme also involves new skills with regard to co-ordination and assessment of student progress. The changes involving teachers are widespread and include changes in the school environment, in relationships with parents, community members and local employers. All of these are advocated by the LCVP Support Service (DES, 1999:14) as being paramount in the planning and implementing stage of curricular innovations. In addition, the culture of a school staff must change in order to accommodate such a programme. Teamwork among staff members raises further issues for teachers unaccustomed to cross curricular and inter disciplinary work and changes working relationships with colleagues. The rich and varied literature on curriculum implementation raises many issues regarding curriculum development and educational change which also have implications for teachers. Topics such as the change process itself, curriculum development, the implementation process, staff development, school culture and the role of external bodies also have implications in the study of the implementation of the LCVP.

The importance of staff development is also discussed at length in the literature. The importance of changes in the beliefs and values of those involved, to coincide with changes in behaviour, relationships and skills are highlighted. That staff members understand the rationale and philosophy behind a proposed change is crucial and fortunately this study shows that this aspect of the dissemination

process has been achieved through the LCVP Support Service guidelines and through the in-service which was experienced by two of the respondents. It is clear from 10 of the 12 teachers surveyed in the school that they did not have a very clear understanding of the rationale and philosophy behind the LCVP. To address this whole school in-service may be required. This should be composed of workshops and exemplars, outlining aspects such as course structure, assessment, evaluation and time tabling. That we are in a time of change is evident. How schools respond to this change is less clear cut.

Implications for School Management

There seems to be room for improvement in the way management in the school support and encourage teachers in their role, 10 of the teachers questioned stated that they were allocated LCVP students without consultation. It is evident therefore that teachers believe that management have not made a sufficiently serious effort to consult with them in relation to the LCVP. It is understandable that, because of subject choices by students and changes in teaching personnel, it may be necessary to allocate some teachers who may not have volunteered, but to have such a large number not having being consulted is problematic. The LCVP Support Service (DES, 1999:17) suggest that for new curricular innovations to work it requires teachers who are willing and committed in their involvement in the programme stemming from an early stage.

Another aspect of the implementation process that teachers felt needed to be addressed was the lack of time set aside for planning, meetings and discussion. The lack of available time was frequently mentioned during the focus group discussion as a huge stumbling block to effective collaboration and consultation within the school, between management and staff and staff and staff. Darling Hammond (1995) in her research indicates the importance of dialogue to establish the school's needs whilst also serving to create a sense of involvement and empowerment for the staff, thus reducing the risk of marginalising teachers. As Hargreaves (1994:15) highlights, shortage of time is one of the perennial complaints of teachers, "scarcity of time makes it difficult to plan more thoroughly, to commit oneself to the efforts of innovation, to get together with colleagues, or sit back and reflect on ones purposes and progress". There is a

need for the schools timetable to facilitate and support the teachers in providing time for joint work, and the message coming very clearly from the respondents is that this time should be in school time, preferably on staff days. As Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:47) state "small increments in time for teachers to work together outside class time within the school day can make a real difference to improvement efforts". Constant consultation with the staff is also paramount. From the outset Fullan (1991:51) points out that the "perceived quality" of the innovation must be understood. These aspects did not feature significantly in the school according to the teachers interviewed. As both the co-ordinator and the selected teachers reported in their interviews, the LCVP was offered in the school "without any prior consultation or involvement on their part" (Teacher X). 83% of the respondents stated that they had little or no involvement in the schools decision to offer LCVP. But such imposition can actually disable teachers and their effectiveness because there is no forum to air grievances, concerns, or ask questions (Stoll & Fink, 1995). Coolahan (1995:14) also highlights the importance of compromise in implementation. Teachers must be facilitated in establishing does it address a need, what will they have to do exactly, how will it impact on them in terms of time, energy, extra workload and responsibilities and how rewarding will it be in terms of interaction with their peers.

Those interviewed did comment on how the LCVP was briefly mentioned at staff meetings and how the LCVP co-ordinator did address the staff occasionally, but it still appears that the implementation of the LCVP was not actually discussed but rather "mentioned" as one respondents puts it. Generally school management should give priority to the development of a team culture amongst the staff to facilitate "the successful implementation of the programme" (DES, 1999:12). Such measures mean that "staff are well informed" on the implementation taking place. It's advocated that such a structured approach will help manage the change effectively, (1999:12). Eileen Flynn (2002) in her research also found that the involvement of a small number of people initially, will facilitate the development of a shared vision thus providing a driving force for change" (2002:16). In addition to supplement this the LCVP Support Service (1995)also recommend that schools should develop a "programme statement" outlining the reasons for their participation in the programme, stating their aims, objectives and expected

outcomes of the programme for their individual school. This is something the school could bear in mind for future implementations. Generally schools must take ownership of innovations and shape them to their students' needs. "We must adapt programmes not adopt them, it's not the case of one size fits all" (Coolahan 1995:21)

Difficulties encountered

Generally a lack of staff involvement, consultation and in-service training, have been acknowledged as some of the difficulties that were reported in the school, but which could have been avoided. In addition the fact that the students were indirectly streamed, was also problematic. Such a streaming policy is not recommended by the LCVP Support Service. In the 1997 evaluation by the Inspectorate of the DES, it was reported that "students were rarely organised into discrete groups within a school" (1997:14). The LCVP Support Service (1999) in their implementation guidelines also recommend that LCVP students should only be grouped together for their Link Modules (1999:16). Therefore in actual fact because of the internal structure of the programme in the school the problems that have been reported could have all been avoided.

Involving partners (parents & students).

In focusing on the management of an innovation such as the LCVP there is a tendency to concentrate on the day to day practicalities such as staffing, timetable, curriculum, resources and budget, and think of students only in that they are the *beneficiaries* of change. Fullan (1991:11) comments on this and suggests that students should be seen as the *participants* in the process of change. He states "all innovations by definition involve something new for students...any innovation that requires new activities on the part of students will succeed or fail according to whether students actually participate to the extent that they understand and are motivated to try what is expected".

Likewise Mortimore (1993:21) states that learning is most likely when the students hold a positive view of the school and their role in it. However 4 of the 6 teachers questioned believed that lack of student interest in LCVP was as a result of the poor perception of the programme and was fundamental in the failing of the LCVP in the school.

In addition Hargreaves et al (1996:47) and Granville (1999) highlight the importance of having parents on board from an early stage in the implementation process. All the teachers questioned identified a lack of parental involvement in the school as being a key reason for the discontinuation of the LCVP. As a result of lack of information and understanding about the rationale of the LCVP there may have been parental pressure for traditional academic standards and subject based qualifications instead of support for the new innovation. The co-ordinator in his interview agreed that "no parental participation took place with regard to offering the programme initially **but** parents of all students going into senior cycle (pending 5th years) were invited to an information night in the school in relation specifically to LCVP. I myself organised and delivered the night".

The Importance of Review and Reflection

The opportunity to interact with colleagues causes teachers to be more reflective in their own work and creates a more cohesive and supportive school environment, and a culture more conducive to change it would appear. This importance of reflection and review is clearly outlined in all the literature but in the school it was reported by 9 of the 12 teachers questioned that little or no evaluation had ever taken place with regard to LCVP. The co-ordinator in his interview confirmed this and commented on the fact that informal evaluation had taken place but it was only between the principal and the himself, no students or teachers were involved. Therefore in the busy schedule of senior cycle teachers who are involved in the LCVP there is a danger that this important aspect could be sidelined or dismissed. Following the first year of the LCVP it would be important to have of meeting of the teachers involved to review the progress of the students and the programme in general. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:87) sum up the dilemma well when they state,

> in the rush of events, and in the face of overload, there never seems to be time to reflect, and take stock, to check out what we really are doing and why. Pressure precludes time to reflect. Lack of reflection obscures ways to relieve the pressure. The cycle is a vicious one

In addition Stoll and Fink (1995) believe school self-evaluation is central to implementation because real improvement comes from within. The N.C.C.A.

(2002) believes "successful implementation of change is achievable through meaningful discussion...consultation...considered planning...and by incorporating processes of evaluation from the outset", (NCCA, 2002:71). Such promotes "team empowerment and leads ultimately to a successful and dynamic programme", (DES, 1999:15). But this requires time and support.

Conclusion

Given the ability of educationalists to formulate new programmes, the task facing them is the dissemination and successful implementation of such ideas. Further work in the study of the implementation process includes a wider study of factors affecting implementation of curricular innovations in schools. Application of the findings of studies on implementation is also worthy of further research. The findings of this study suggest that contact with other teachers in other schools is a valuable asset during implementation. The developments for channels for the flow of communication and support between schools, and between teachers within schools, is worthy of research.

Currently two transitions can be recognised. On the cusp of the century, societies are changing and with accelerating programmes of educational reform, schools are changing. Curriculum reform policies and implementation plans are often put together in ways which assume relatively ideal school conditions, yet the work of schools is far from ideal, rather it is unpredictable and highly variable. Furthermore, the complexity involved in such changes cannot be broken down into discrete variables that can be tackled individually. Fullan and Promfret (1975:121) conclude from their study of the implementation process that:

> "The issue is not so much whether one can measure or assess degree of implementation but whether the implementation process is conceptualised as a problem to be addressed".

That we recognise that the implementation process is an issue worthy of research is a starting point.

Chapter Six

Recommendations

Introduction

Arising out of the analysis and review of findings, some recommendations will be put forward to assist developing the best professional practice in the adoption and implementation of new curricular initiatives at school level, in this case the initiative being the LCVP. These recommendations will be made under the general headings outlined. Before proceeding to this it is important to emphasise that the conclusions and recommendations are based on the situation in the author's school, as investigated in this dissertation. The evidence base for this study is, accordingly, small in scale and it would need to be widened in order to find out whether findings and analyses are applicable elsewhere.

In-Service Training /Professional Development for LCVP Teachers

It is clear from the research evidence, and in a particular way from the finding s of this study, that, wherever an innovation such as the LCVP is being introduced in a school, careful consideration needs to be given to the in-service needs of the teachers involved. Providing effective staff development programmes that promote curricular change and support teacher learning is challenging. Although the once-off out-of-school workshop is a very important component of staff development programmes, it is not sufficient in itself. Because teachers have differing needs and interests they may seek different kinds of information and assistance as they work toward implementing educational innovations and this must be addressed and accommodated. The in-service education provided by the LCVP Support Service in the Kildare Education Centre has been welcomed by those who have experienced it, but if anything, it has whetted their appetite for more. With the number of schools involved in the LCVP increasing every year, it is essential that the Support Service not alone be maintained, but also expanded

and developed. In providing for the on-going support for schools and teachers opting to offer the LCVP, hopefully the Support Service will heed the advice from Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:99) who state that "different approaches are necessary for the beginning teacher and the mid and later career teacher." Therefore there is a need to provide on-going teacher education courses in schools so that teachers who join the teaching team during the school year have access to all the necessary information and new approaches. As Fullan (1991:90) states, "very few programs plan for the orientation and in-service support of new members, who arrive after the program gets started". In the absence of formal structures provided by the LCVP Support Service the onus for this will fall to the course co-ordinator and school management.

The LCVP Support Service offer a service of development officers who have "proved most effective over the last number of years in promoting awareness among staff". Where possible these visits should be an integral part of any schools implementation plan as they serve to "motivate staff "according to the LCVP Support Service, (1999:31). Generally the areas that were reported as being most important in the implementation of the LCVP in the school by the respondents could have been addressed as a workshop or in a whole staff briefing. This is just one of a range of school-based supports that the LCVP Support Service offer and the school would have much to benefit from availing of such a service.

Improving Communications with the Teaching Team

Improved communication is seen as central to improving teacher collaboration. This communication flow, both upwards and downwards, is vital in the building up of interpersonal relationships within the school. The provision of a LCVP notice board in the staffroom would be a valuable way of keeping all the staff informed of relevant information. Then they would have ready access to things like assessment criteria, course structure, Link Module details and other relevant matters. A list of students and teachers involved could also be displayed. Another pertinent comment made by the teachers questioned was the fact that they were unsure or unclear about the course structure (assessment and requirements

for Link Modules). Such information needs to be compiled and made readily available to the teachers throughout the year.

Celebrating Success

It is very important that staff feel valued in our schools. Stoll and Fink (1996) identify 4 types of esteem that staff experience in their research on secondary schools. These are consideration and praise; feedback, delegation, and consultation and participation. The LCVP offers possibilities for management to incorporate all of these. Just as the students welcome regular feedback through their results in school, the teacher also gets satisfaction from seeing this type of progress. It is evident from the focus group discussion that teachers of the Link Modules and the ECDL especially, take great pride in the work of their students and it is therefore important that occasions are provided in the school year when this work can be put on display so that students and teachers involved in the LCVP can see and appreciate the work. Also, parents and members of the local community could have access to this display on school open days or other school functions. This would serve, moreover, to raise the low profile of this course within the school and in the local community.

Evaluation

Evaluation should be constantly encouraged. It is fair to conclude from the research evidence that if teachers feel safe to experiment with innovations they will begin to react as a whole, forming in time a collective sense of responsibility. To date in the school all L.C.V.P. teachers have never met collectively as a team. Little time has been set aside for reflection or the sharing of ideas. Feedback and experiences have not been systematically harnessed, lessons from the past have not influenced adaptation for the future; elements that form key recommendations by Fullan (1995).

The Role of School Leadership

Research findings on the adoption and implementation of innovations highlight the point that school leaders should assist change where possible through support,

helping develop teacher commitments and capacities to engage in reform. Leadership should facilitate the creation of a culture which is learning-focused and curious, experiential and rarely fearful of its mistakes. Delegation is essential, serving to enable the co-ordinator to share tasks. School management also need the capacity to communicate at a range of levels and in various modes. Law and Glover (2000) believe that clarity is crucial to get objectives across whilst validating and justifying them, thus allowing the reasons for implementing the programme to emerge. School leadership, where possible, must articulate the reasons behind a new programme before the actual implementation of the programme in order to gain staff support. In this regard it might be beneficial to work on building a more democratic structure of increased teacher-pupil engagement in the school. Smyth (1999) highlights the importance of this in her research. As the research for this dissertation has highlighted, neither staff nor students have been adequately involved in the implementation or development of the LCVP in the school. As a result little ownership has evolved. One further negative effect of this is that many teachers are reluctant to get involved at all now. In turn there is too little consistency for students in the programme. Some of the above issues might profitably be addressed for staff by establishing committees to act as formal structures of communication and by encouraging a more transformational style of leadership.

Student Cohort

As a result of indirect streaming in the school, a number of related problems have emerged. The LCVP students were established as a base class, thus being taught together for most subjects. Accordingly, they were easily recognisable as a "lower" stream of students. They have proven a very difficult group of students to teach, illustrating the strains that are put on healthy relationships between teachers and students because of a streaming effect. In future then it would be crucial to have a more mixed ability cohort of students undertake the programme. Improved staff and student knowledge of the structure and rationale of the LCVP in addition to increased staff collaboration might further this goal. Mixed ability grouping would also mean there would be more interaction between classes and groups of students, and less stereotyping of students who undertake the LCVP programme, hopefully promoting more positive discipline within the student

cohort. Emer Smyth's extensive studies of Irish school settings have pointed out that "bad behaviour can occur in lower streams because of pupils' recognition of their place in the scheme of things, at the bottom", (Smyth, 1999:58). In contrast, mixed-ability groupings illustrates a high commitment to the rules and norms of the school according to Lynch, (1993:251). It avoids the idea of students becoming polarised into pro and anti school subcultures. Classes are easier to teach and it's more common that relationships of mutual respect are given a chance to develop. Whilst labelling and stereotyping are common human responses in complex social situations they "can limit the teacher's expectations of their pupils, putting a strain on relationships", (Lynch, 1999:58). Therefore offering the LCVP to a wider academic student cohort might alleviate some of the discipline problems that teachers interviewed reported as being very problematic.

Suggestions for further study

This study has focused on the process of implementation in relation to the LCVP. The role of the teacher, school leadership and school cultures conducive to change have been investigated in this research, albeit from the perspective of teachers. The benefits of greater teacher collaboration have been outlined in the research literature and in the findings from this research study but such aspects could be a fruitful areas of research in the future. Hopefully there will be many aspects of this study which will encourage others to attempt similar projects in their own schools, so that on-going practical research leads to continuing improvement in this new curricular innovation to meet student's needs and abilities. Let me conclude with an apt quotation from Michael Fullan:

> "Change can be achieved by ordinary people doing ordinary things. It is not necessary to be extraordinary"
>
> (Fullan, 1993:30).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

9th February 2004

Dear ,

As part of an M. Ed. In School Leadership which I am undertaking at Maynooth NUI, I am currently writing a dissertation on the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The aim of the dissertation is to examine two interrelated themes.

Firstly to investigate the process of curricular innovations, in this case the introduction of the LCVP in a newly constituted school. Secondly in the light of emergent findings I aim to assess the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of an innovation such as the LCVP.

The enclosed questionnaire forms part of the research and I would be grateful if you would complete it for me. I am distributing it to all teachers who are teaching LCVP students this year. As a member of that selection of teachers your views and opinions are essential to the study as they will provide a good overall evaluation of your thinking on the topics outlined in the questionnaire.

The information collected in the questionnaire is for research purposes only. It will be regarded as confidential and will not be linked to any individual by name or subject. In other words, the norms of anonymity will be observed, both in relation to the identity of the school and of teachers.

I am aware that this is a very busy time of the school year for you and your time in completing this questionnaire is much appreciated.

On completion, please return the questionnaire, in the envelope provided, to my post box in the staff room.

Thanks for your help,

Yours sincerely,

_____

Rachel McGrath

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
Teacher Questionnaire

1. Gender: Male ☐
   Female ☐

2. Number of years you have been teaching
   1-5 ☐
   6-10 ☐
   Over 10 ☐

3. What subjects do you teach? (Exclude Link Modules at this point)

   _____

   _____

4. Do you believe there is a need for LCVP in the school?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
   Please explain why?

_____

_____

_____

5. In your view to what extent has the rationale of the LCVP been *understood* among the teachers in the school?
   To a great extent ☐
   To a moderate extent ☐
   To little or no extent ☐
   Please explain your answer

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. To what extent in your view was the rationale *realised* in the school
   To a great extent ☐
   To a moderate extent ☐
   To little or no extent ☐

7. Do you teach any of the following Link Modules in LCVP
   - Preparation for the world of work ☐
   - Enterprise education ☐

Programme Implementation at school level:

8. What process was engaged in at school level in deciding to offer the programme initially?

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. To what extent were you involved in the school's decision to offer LCVP in the school
   To a great extent ☐
   To a moderate extent ☐
   To little or no extent ☐

10. To the best of your knowledge, to what extent did parents actively participate in the initial decision to offer the programme
    To a great extent ☐
    To a moderate extent ☐
    To little or no extent ☐

11. Who in your view was involved in making the following curriculum decisions for the LCVP?

- Decisions regarding the organisation of student groups

_____

- Decisions regarding the offering of this curricular innovation

_____

- Decisions regarding what teachers would be involved in teaching the programme

_____

12. How are the students selected for participation in LCVP in the school
    (Mark more than one of the following if relevant)
    They apply for a place ☐
    As a result of teacher recommendation ☐
    As a result of their academic history ☐
    As a result of parents request/ recommendation ☐

Factors affecting Implementation:

13. The Department of Education and Science attributes importance to some of the following factors in implementing curricular innovations such as the LCVP.
    In your view, how important are these factors in the implementation of the LCVP at school level.

(Please circle one number, where 1 is unimportant and 5 is very important)

	Unimportant				*Important*
Team work among staff members	1	2	3	4	5
Support of principal	1	2	3	4	5
Resources for the new programme	1	2	3	4	5
Public status of the new course i.e. the perceptions of parents and pupils	1	2	3	4	5
Extra time for planning and curricular development	1	2	3	4	5
Credibility of the programme in the eyes of the staff	1	2	3	4	5
In service preparation and training for the programme	1	2	3	4	5
Social background of students	1	2	3	4	5
Suitability of students (ability and aptitude)	1	2	3	4	5
A LCVP coordinator	1	2	3	4	5

If there are any other factors you would regard as important in the implementation of the LCVP programme, please state them and rate them 1-5.

_____

_____

14. The LCVP is being discontinued in the school. In your view, what are the chief reasons for this? Please rank the following possibilities on a 1 to 5 scale. (1 *for the most important and 5 for the least important).*

Lack of interest among staff ☐
Lack of interest among students ☐
Lack of knowledge about the programme among staff ☐
Lack of knowledge about the programme among students ☐
Lack of knowledge about the programme by parents ☐
Poor implementation ☐
Lack of time for planning and evaluation ☐
Other

_____

The involvement of teachers in the LCVP:

15. Please tick the sentence that indicates how you became involved in the LCVP

- It was my choice to become part of the LCVP teaching team ☐
- I was allocated LCVP classes after consultation with management ☐

- I was allocated LCVP classes without consultation with management ☐
- Other (please specify)

_____

_____

16. In your opinion what difficulties, if any, have arisen since the introduction of the programme which were not anticipated

_____

_____

_____

17. Are there any particular forms of support, internally or externally, that have be used and been beneficial in the running of the programme?
    Yes ☐
    Please state the name of such_____
    No ☐

18. What advice would you give to a school which is starting LCVP?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Evaluation of the programme by the school:

19. The Department of Education and Science recommends that new programmes such as the LCVP should be evaluated in a systematic way. To what extent has such taken place with regard to the named programme in the school?
    To a great extent ☐
    To a moderate extent ☐
    To little or no extent ☐

20. To your Knowledge have you availed of the services of the LCVP support team to try and address any of the problems that have arisen
    Yes ☐
    No ☐
    If yes, in what capacity?

_____

_____

In-service Training

21. In-service training is another important feature that the Department of Education and Science emphasises when implementing new programmes at school level.
    To what extent has such in-service been a feature in this school's LCVP.
    To a great extent ☐
    To a moderate extent ☐
    To little or no extent ☐

22. If you did not receive in-service training, which areas would you like some training in?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you very much for your time and co operation in completing this questionnaire. Please return it to my post box in the envelope provided on or before Friday the 13th of February 2004.

APPENDIX II

Focus Group/ Interview Schedule
Teachers Interview Outline

1. What subject areas do you teach?

2. How long have you being teaching the LCVP

3. How did you become involved? Did you volunteer, were you asked by the principal, or was it just included in your timetable?

4. Is this your first time to teach the LCVP

Q 5 – 8 For Link Module Teachers only

5. Did you attend in service training before starting to teach this programme

6. To what extent did you benefit from it

7. To what extent did the in service training prepare you to start teaching the LCVP link modules with confidence

8. How do you feel about the content of the modules

9. Do you enjoy teaching the programme? Why/why not?

10. Are you aware of what is going on in other subjects? Is it important to be aware

11. Do you actively try to integrate with other subjects

12. Do you include any of the following teaching methodologies in your delivery of the programme
    - practical work
    - group work
    - integrated projects with other areas
    - class discussion
    - research

13. Do you feel there is a need for the LCVP in the school, why, why not

14. to what extent do you believe the rationale of the LCVP to accommodate a wider academic cohort of students was realised in the school? Give reasons for your answer

15. What difficulties, if any, have arisen since the introduction of the programme which were not anticipated in your opinion?

16. Is there anything that could be done to help revive the programme at school level?

APPENDIX III

LCVP Co-ordinator Interview Schedule

1. How long have you been coordinator for LCVP

2. How were you chosen as coordinator?
   Asked by the principal /took on duties as part of a post of responsibility (A or B post)/ Elected by staff members / assumed the role voluntarily

3. What process was engaged in at school level in deciding to offer the programme initially?

4. Did you receive any in service training in relation to co-ordinating the LCVP programme before offering it in the school

5. Was there any parental participation in the initial decision to offer the programme

6. What do you think is the most important single support needed to run a successful LCVP and why?

7. Do you believe there is a need for LCVP in the school?

8. To what extent do you believe the rationale of the LCVP to accommodate a wider academic cohort of students was realised in the school? If not why not?

9. What difficulties, if any, have arisen since the introduction of the programme which were not anticipated in your opinion?

10. Who is involved in making the following curriculum decisions for the LCVP?
    - What students take part in the programme
    - Decisions regarding the organisation of student groups, Why was it decided to keep LCVP students in a base class setting for all subjects
    - Decisions regarding the offering of this curricular innovation
    - Decisions regarding what teachers would be involved in teaching the programme (the link modules). Where these teachers given a choice

11. To what extent does the school management support the LCVP programme

12. Have you been involved in the school decision to cease the LCVP programme. Why do you think the LCVP is being ceased in the school?

13. Are there any forms of support internally or externally (LCVP support team) that have been used and been beneficial in the running of the

programme or in trying to revive it? If so, what are the most important of these?

14. What advice would you give to a school which is starting LCVP

15. Does the school have any contact with other schools in the area in relation to the LCVP? Would you welcome contact with other schools while planning and implementing the programme in your school

16. Is the programme evaluated at school level? Who takes part in this evaluation
    What from does the evaluation take?

Appendix IV

Vocational subject groupings

They are grouped into **specialist groupings**-subjects which complement one another naturally, and the **services groupings**- subjects which complement one another in commercial context.

SPECIALIST GROUPINGS
1. Construction studies or Engineering or Technical Drawing (any two)
2. Physics and Construction Studies or Engineering
3. Agricultural Science and Construction Studies or Engineering
4. Agricultural Science or Chemistry or Physics (any 2)
5. Home Economics and Agricultural Science or Biology
6. Home Economics and Art
7. Accounting and Business

SERVICE GROUPINGS
8. Engineering and Business or Accounting
9. Construction Studies and Business or Accounting
10. Home Economics and Business or Accounting
11. Agricultural Science and Business or Accounting
12. Art and Business or Accounting
13. Music and Business or Accounting

(Dept. of Education and Science, 1999: 7).

Appendix V

Curriculum Comparison

Established Leaving Certificate & the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

	LC Established	**LCVP**
Breadth and balance	7 subjects	7 subjects AND Link Modules
Curriculum integration	Discrete subjects	Cross curricular(Link Modules) and discrete subjects
Organisation	Two year course	Two year course
Pedagogy	Examination, text book focus	Examination, text book focus, portfolio of coursework
Assessment	Summative	Summative Project based
Certificate	Subject by subject	Subject by subject & Link Modules
Participants motivation	Deferred gratification	Deferred gratification
Community involvement	Minimal	Link Module requirement
Work experience	None	2 weeks and career investigation
Focus	product	Product and process for the Link Modules

Source: Adapted from Granville (1995)

Appendix VI

WRITTEN EXAMINATION-40% OF TOTAL MARKS	
Date:	Final year of LC
Duration:	2.5 hours
Content:	Section A: Audio visual presentation
	Section B: Case study received in advance by students
	Section C: General questions (answer 4 out of 6)

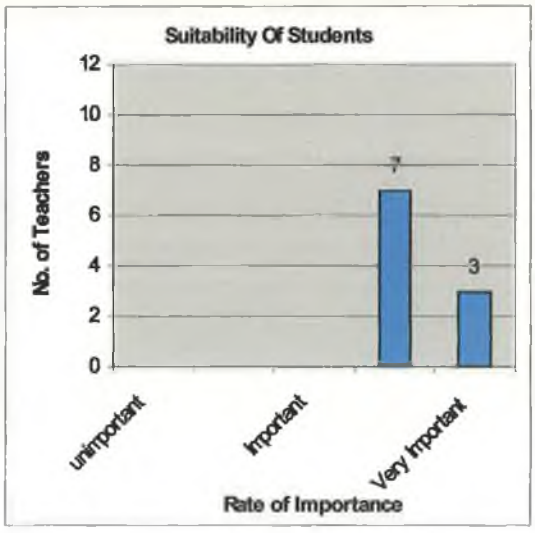
PORTFOLIO OF COURSEWORK-60% OF TOTAL MARKS	
Date:	Assessed at end of final year of LC
Duration:	Assembled over 2 years of the LC
Content:	Section 1: Core items: CV, formal letter, completed form, summary report
	Section 2: optional items: (two out of four)
	Record book/diary, report, plan, and recorded interview/presentation.

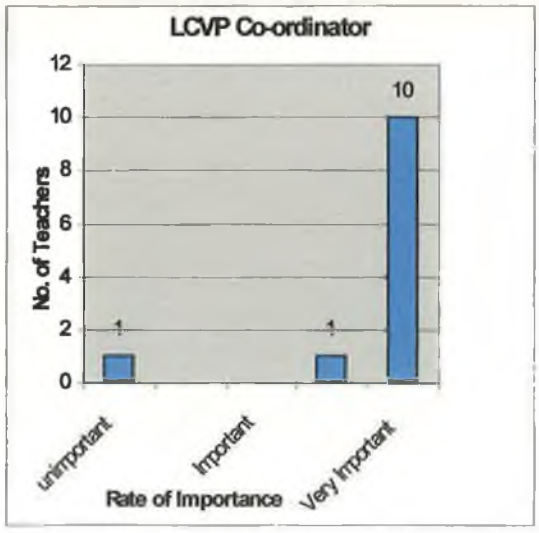
Appendix VII

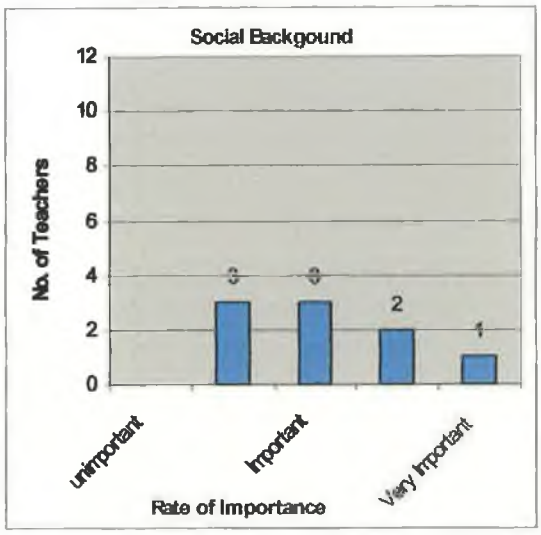
Question 13
The Department of Education and Science attributes importance to some of the following factors in implementing curricular innovations such as the LCVP.
In your view, how important are these factors in the implementation of the LCVP at school level.

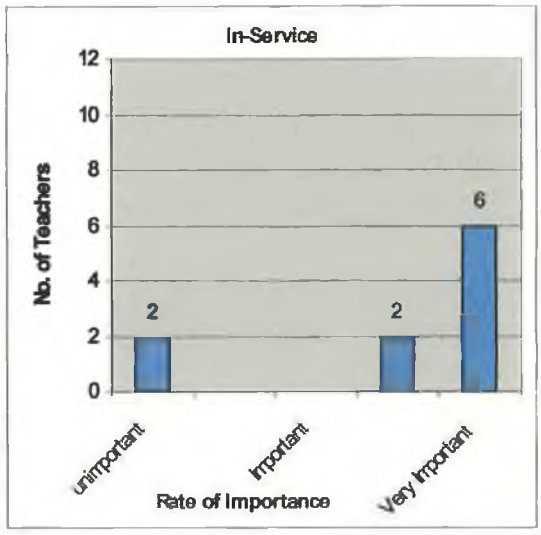
- **Team work among staff members**
- **Support of Principal**
- **Resources for the new programme**
- **Public status of the new course i.e. the perceptions of parents and pupils**
- **Extra time for planning and curricular development**
- **Credibility of the programme in the eyes of the staff**
- **In-service preparation and training for the programme**
- **Social background of students**
- **Suitability of students (ability and aptitude)**
- **A LCVP co-ordinator**
- **Other Factors**

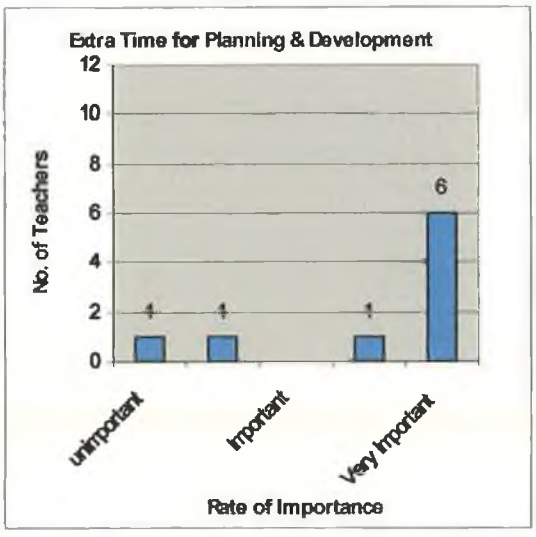
(It should be noted that some of the graphs show a deficit in relation to the number of respondents. 12 teachers were surveyed but in some cases not all 12 responded, so the graphs are compiled only from the responses received.)

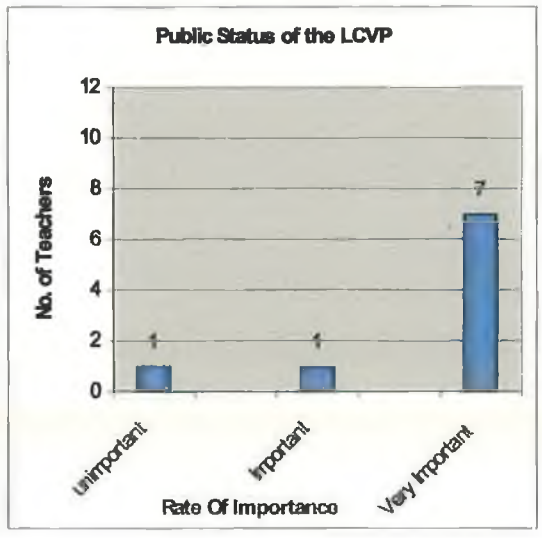


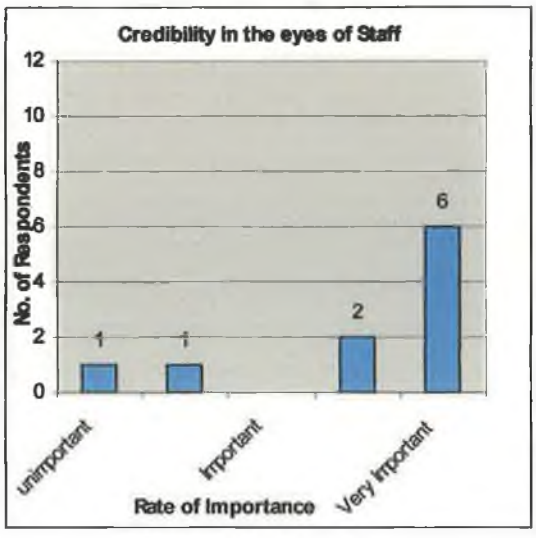


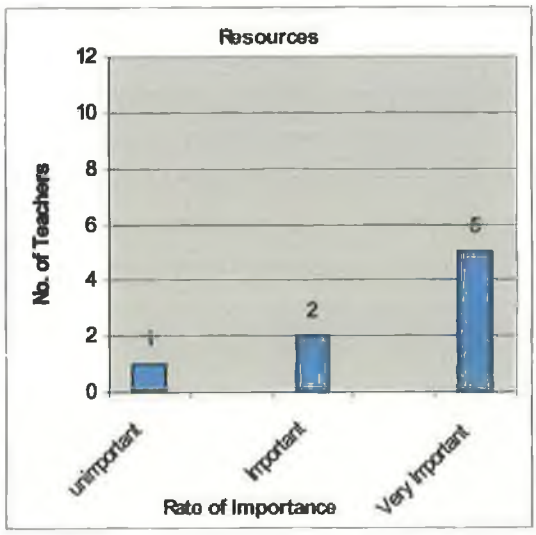

Social Backgound
No. of Teachers
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
3
3
2
1
unimportant
Important
Very Important
Rate of Importance


In-Service
No. of Teachers
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
2
2
6
unimportant
Important
Very Important
Rate of Importance


Extra Time for Planning & Development
No. of Teachers
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
1
1
6
unimportant
Important
Very Important
Rate of Importance


Public Status of the LCVP
No. of Teachers
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
1
7
unimportant
Important
Very Important
Rate Of Importance


Credibility in the eyes of Staff
No. of Respondents
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
1
2
6
unimportant
Important
Very Important
Rate of Importance


Resources
No. of Teachers
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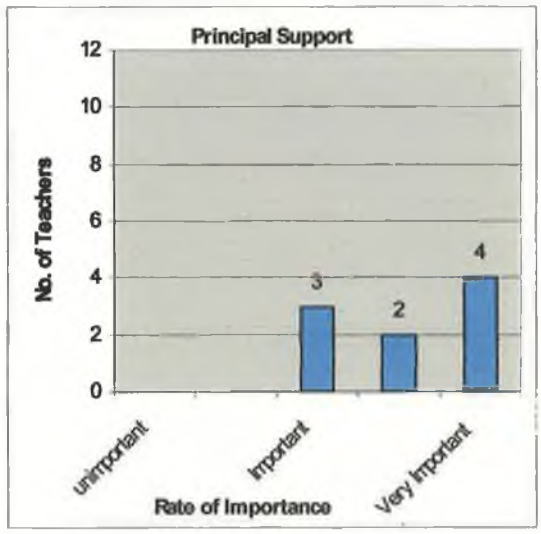
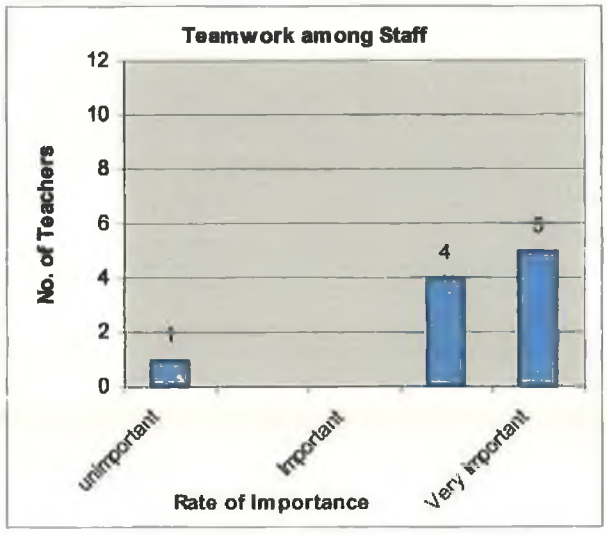
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
2
5
unimportant
important
Very important
Rate of Importance


Principal Support
No. of Teachers
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
3
2
4
unimportant
important
Very important
Rate of Importance


Teamwork among Staff
No. of Teachers
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
4
5
unimportant
important
Very important
Rate of Importance

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