

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Programme Evaluation  
Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme  
REPORT**

**St. Colman's College  
Claremorris, Co. Mayo  
Roll Number: 64610N**

**Date of inspection: 12 November 2010**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

# **EVALUATION OF THE LCVP**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report has been written following an evaluation of the LCVP in St. Colman's College. It presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for the further development of the programme in the school. During the evaluation, the inspector held meetings with the school principal, a core group of teachers and with a small group of students. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector liaised extensively with the programme co-ordinator and visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning. The inspector provided oral feedback to teachers on lessons observed. The inspector also examined students' work and reviewed relevant documentation pertaining to the programme, as well as teachers' written preparation. The outcomes of the evaluation were discussed with the school principal, the deputy principal, the programme co-ordinator and the core team following the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

## **1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION**

### **1.1 Whole school support**

The LCVP was introduced into St. Colman's College in 1994 and is now well established on the school's curriculum. Currently there are two class groups in fifth year and one class group in sixth year following the programme. LCVP students are fully integrated into their year groups and only come together as a discrete group for link module classes.

In the course of the evaluation management and staff showed a strong awareness of the benefits accruing to students from their participation in the programme. The students place a high value on the vocational dimension of the programme, particularly the development of job-seeking skills. It also helps them with career choices and enables them to gain more CAO points. As Business is not included on the school's senior cycle curriculum many students view the LCVP and its associated activities as an ideal opportunity to learn about the world of business.

Implementation of the programme is overseen by a core team comprising the principal and the two link module teachers both of whom have considerable experience of the programme. The school's programme co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor are also members of the core LCVP team. One of the link module teachers was appointed LCVP co-ordinator at the start of the school year.

Senior management is supportive of the programme and teachers have been facilitated to attend in-service. The link module teachers have availed of professional development courses provided by the Second Level Support Service. It is encouraged that the link module teachers attend available continuing professional development on a rotational basis so as to remain updated in programme developments.

It is commendable that steps have been taken to increase whole-staff awareness of the LCVP. Upcoming LCVP events are displayed on a notice board in the staff room and on a digital screen in the canteen area. The co-ordinator gave an input to staff on the requirements of the LCVP. A copy of the programme's specific learning outcomes was also provided to each department to integrate into subject plans and some potential cross-curricular links between the link modules and vocational subject groupings (VSGs) were highlighted. School management should facilitate a

meeting between the co-ordinator and VSG teachers at the start of the year so that further cross-curricular linkages can be identified, planned and discussed. This provision will enhance the cross-curricular dimension of the programme and support student learning in an integrated manner across the programme.

## **1.2 Resources**

The LCVP benefits from a good level of resource provision. While there is no dedicated budget for LCVP management is very supportive of any requests for resources. Teachers and students have very good access to information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. Teachers' base classrooms are equipped with a laptop and data projector. The computer room is available to classes during timetabled lessons for the link modules. The link module teachers have built up a large stock of resources for the programme. Very effective use is made of ICT in generating resources and the school's Moodle site contains a comprehensive range of LCVP specific resources to support teaching and learning. Students commented very favourably on the benefits of access to this e-learning website. The LCVP co-ordinator is commended for the compilation of these resources on the school's server.

Staff are appropriately deployed to the programme and members of the LCVP teaching team are qualified in Business, Geography, English and French. This provision is commended as it brings a wide range of experience and expertise to the implementation of the programme.

There is no timetabled guidance for fifth-year and sixth-year students. For both year groups curriculum support is provided by the guidance service through the borrowing of occasional classes and students in sixth year have scheduled individual appointments with the guidance counsellor. It is recommended that formal timetabled involvement of the guidance department be put in place to support the delivery of the LCVP curriculum. This service would be of great benefit to students in preparation for the world of work and would assist them in conducting career investigations.

## **1.3 Student selection and support**

The LCVP is a popular senior-cycle optional programme. Traditionally, the programme has had a good level of uptake. In line with LCVP objectives there is open access to the programme for all students. In fifth year subject bands are designed in such a way as to afford as many students as possible entry to the programme. Students who have the appropriate VSG requirements are strongly encouraged to follow the LCVP.

It was reported that there are a very small number of students with additional educational needs following the LCVP. While there is no additional LCVP specific support available to these students as part of the school's learning-support provision, link module teachers provide extra individual attention to students, where necessary, within the mainstream setting.

## **1.4 Home-school links**

An open night is held for parents and students in the second term to provide information on senior-cycle subjects and optional programmes. The guidance counsellor and programme co-ordinator advise and support parents in this process. In the future, the LCVP co-ordinator who has a very good knowledge of the programme should provide an input on the nature, requirements and benefits of the LCVP. Additional means of informing parents about the programme are planned and include the school's new website, the availability of programme literature and providing

parents with the learning plan for the two years of the LCVP. These planned developments are commended.

Good links have been established with local employers, businesses, and voluntary and community groups. School management and staff place a high value on these contacts and are appreciative of the supports they extend to the LCVP. Very good links are in place with third-level institutions. The guidance counsellor organises an annual trip to the Higher Options Conference in addition to school visits from officers of the most popular colleges chosen by students.

## **2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND COORDINATION**

### **2.1 Planning**

Prior to the current academic year planning for the LCVP was at an early stage of development and largely conducted on an informal basis. Since September 2010 school management has put in place a number of structures, including the appointment of a co-ordinator and the establishment of a core team to facilitate a systematic and formal approach to planning for the LCVP and its implementation. The core team meets on a formal basis each fortnight and has embarked on extensive long-term planning to support the development of a more comprehensive and integrated programme. This is commended.

The LCVP co-ordinator is highly commended for the extensive work that has been carried out in developing a programme plan. The plan is well thought out and is a very valuable resource for the LCVP team as it contains all relevant programme documentation in addition to a broad range of resources and templates to support the implementation and delivery of the LCVP. All members of the LCVP teaching team should contribute to the ongoing development and update of the plan in relation to their subject areas.

Curricular plans for teaching the link modules have been prepared. Currently the LCVP co-ordinator takes responsibility for completing the portfolio items with each class group and the other link module teacher covers the theoretical elements of the LCVP syllabus. It is recommended that full responsibility for any one class group should be allocated to the same teacher for all elements of the course. This will enable the theory and corresponding portfolio items to be taught simultaneously and be developed in an integrated manner as is envisaged in the syllabus. In this regard the curricular plans should be revisited and common programmes of work, including common assessment, should be developed for each class group over the two years of the programme. The schemes of work should also be extended in scope and content linked to teaching resources, methodologies and assessment modes used to evaluate students' progress.

As part of the cycle of planning it is commended that review and evaluation of the LCVP has been initiated. A strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) analysis of the programme was conducted at the start of the year. This process identified key priority areas for development and a range of objectives was established to improve the implementation of the LCVP and educational outcomes for students. It was evident during the evaluation that good progress had already been made in achieving some targets. For example, results obtained by students in the state examinations have been analysed, whole-staff awareness of the programme has been enhanced and record keeping procedures for students' portfolio progress have been improved. There is also a strong commitment to continued planning for the ongoing enhancement of the programme. It is recommended that an annual evaluation of the programme should be carried out and this should include the views of students and parents obtained through questionnaires. As a means of

assessing the progress made, the outcomes of each review should be recorded in the evaluation section of the LCVP plan.

## **2.2 Co-ordination**

The recently appointed co-ordinator, a link module teacher since 2008 has a thorough knowledge of the LCVP. The co-ordinator is participating in the LCVP online training course and will attend co-ordination in-service as it becomes available. This commitment to professional development is commended. The co-ordinator has worked hard in leading planning for the enhanced implementation of the LCVP in the school. An extensive range of duties are carried out by the co-ordinator in an effective and efficient manner. These responsibilities include administrative, organisational and planning activities as well as monitoring portfolio items and liaising with key personnel including the principal, guidance counsellor, programmes co-ordinator and school examinations secretary. It is suggested, subject to the availability of resources, that some time should be allocated for co-ordination duties as the role is not linked to a post of responsibility. In line with good practice the co-ordinator is timetabled to teach link module lessons, which ensures ongoing contact with students.

The programme co-ordinator has overarching responsibility for the LCVP work experience programme. An extensive database of potential employers with relevant contact details has been compiled and this is made available to students to assist them in sourcing work placements. This is commended. Students generally organise their own experience and assistance is provided by the programme co-ordinator if a student is having difficulty finding a suitable placement. Preparation of students for work experience is thorough. A number of students have been facilitated to complete the Safe Pass Course and all students participated in the Choose Safety Programme provided by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). It is planned for the current academic year that prior to going on work experience students will have completed a career investigation to assist them in making more informed choices in relation to work experience in the career area of their choice. This is good practice. There are good arrangements in place to support the work experience programme. Formal contact is made with employers in advance of and following the work placement. Members of staff visit the workplaces to check on students' progress. It is also good practice that employers are requested to submit an evaluation report detailing the students' performance during the work placement.

## **2.3 Curriculum**

Students qualify to follow the LCVP through a variety of VSG combination. Combinations involving Engineering, Construction Studies, Design and Communication Graphics, Biology and Agricultural Science are the most common.

The link modules teachers work well as a team. A team teaching approach has been adopted to cover some areas of the syllabus and procedures are in place to facilitate the sharing of resources. This collaborative approach to the delivery of the link modules is commended.

Timetabled allocation for the link modules consists of two single class periods per week in both fifth year and sixth year. It is recommended that an additional class period be assigned to fifth-year students in line with syllabus guidelines. Consideration should also be given to the provision of a double class period to facilitate in-school visits and other enterprise activities. Link module lessons are timetabled concurrently with study periods. Whilst acknowledging the difficulty in providing alternative lessons for a relatively small cohort of non-LCVP students this arrangement is not satisfactory and should be addressed for future years.

Students who do not study a modern European language to Leaving Certificate level are provided with a school-based module in French. Timetabled provision for the ab-initio language module consisting of one class period per week over the two years of the programme complies with LCVP requirements. An appropriate plan, suited to the needs and abilities of students has been developed for the LCVP language module. The plan provides a focus on vocabulary and language skills to enable students to communicate in everyday situations for example, when taking the train, seeking directions and dining in a restaurant. The programme in place also aims to develop students' awareness of French culture and a variety of themes are covered including French family and social life, traditions, music and cinema. These provisions are commended. It is planned that the school will provide students with certification for their participation in this module. This is commended.

The programme, as currently constituted provides an emphasis on *Preparation for the World of Work*. Visiting speakers to the school have given presentations to students on various aspects of business, enterprise and careers. In the future it is recommended that programme planning should provide a greater focus on *Enterprise Education*, including visits out to businesses and student engagement in a variety of enterprise activities. These activities will provide rich opportunity for teamwork, active experiential learning and will give greater choice to students when selecting material for their portfolios.

### **3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

#### **3.1 Planning and preparation**

There was evidence of effective short-term planning for the lessons observed. A range of good quality materials has been prepared in advance to support the delivery of lesson content. These made a positive contribution to students' learning. ICT is very well integrated into the programme. Students can access electronically an extensive range of resources to support and direct them in their studies. These include marking schemes, portfolio item templates, guidelines on course materials and solutions to examination questions. Teachers are highly commended for this level of planning and preparation which facilitates self-directed learning

#### **3.2 Learning and teaching**

The subject matter taught was appropriate to the syllabus and teachers demonstrated a very good knowledge of the topics under study. In all lessons the learning objectives were clear and stated at the outset. Lesson content was well structured in line with these learning objectives. The pace of lessons was generally appropriate and a good level of material was covered.

Teaching and learning were most effective where there was good balance between teacher-led instruction and student input. In these cases instruction was appropriately combined with questioning so that students were challenged to consider and analyse the material being presented. Students were kept on task through effective and inclusive questioning strategies and their contributions to class discussions provided clear evidence of their active participation in the lesson. Other active learning methodologies used to engage students included worksheet activities, pair work and the use of peer assessment. These strategies are commended. In other lessons a more traditional and didactic approach was in evidence and while teacher explanations were thorough the students input to the lesson was limited. It is recommended that all lessons should incorporate methodologies that facilitate the active engagement of students in their own learning.

There was very good use of ICT to present information in a concise, structured and visually attractive manner. These PowerPoint presentations highlighted the key learning points and provided good stimulation for students. In one lesson team teaching was conducted effectively and the teachers worked well together. One teacher provided instruction on the topic while the other rotated among students providing individual support and reinforcing points at whole-class level where considered necessary. This approach is commended and is reflective of the good spirit of collegiality between the link module teachers.

There was a good emphasis on subject terminology and terms were reinforced and used throughout lessons. It is strongly encouraged that students, particularly those who do not study business related subjects maintain a glossary of these terms. In the language lesson observed there was appropriate integration of oral, aural and written language skills. All students participated extremely well in the planned activities and they were both confident and competent in communicating in the target language at a basic level.

In one lesson peer assessment was employed and students exchanged copies and corrected each other's work. This is commended and a good level of feedback was provided by the teacher as students read out each others answers. It is planned to extend the use of peer assessment among LCVP students and this is encouraged as a way of enabling students to evaluate and improve their own work. Homework is regularly set for students. In some cases there is scope, however, for more substantial written exercises to be assigned so that students have the opportunity to practice answering questions and to develop writing skills. It is good practice that students have folders to file worksheets and other supplementary materials as this enables students to readily access resources when necessary. The majority of lessons evaluated were held in one of the link module teacher's base classroom. The teacher had taken the opportunity to develop an appropriate learning environment through the display of LCVP posters and other related materials. This is commended.

A disciplined, positive and affirming atmosphere was evident in all lessons. Where there was a good level of interaction between students and teachers, the students engaged well and showed a good knowledge and level of understanding.

### **3.3 Assessment**

Assessment of students is carried out on a continuous basis in lessons through observation of classroom interactions, questioning, correction of portfolio items and homework. Very good practices are in place for the monitoring of portfolio work. ICT is used in the correction of work and each student has a folder on the school's server. Draft portfolio documents prepared by students are submitted by e-mail to the teacher. This work is provided with appropriate developmental feedback and corrected thoroughly in line with examination marking schemes. These items are then returned to students for subsequent amendment. This system is highly commended as it facilitates regular checking and close monitoring of students' work. A number of portfolio items were viewed during the evaluation and these were completed to a high standard.

Both link module teachers are involved in the correction of LCVP certificate examinations. This brings very valuable experience and insights into marking schemes and examination strategies. The results obtained in certificate examinations are analysed and compared with national norms. Following discussions held during the evaluation targets should now be set to raise student attainment at the higher levels of achievement.

Parents are informed on students' progress at parent-teacher meetings and through progress reports issued twice a year based on students' portfolio work. It is recommended that students' progress in the theory elements of the LCVP be assessed through formal written in-house examinations in line with the assessment procedures in place for all other subjects at senior cycle. It is planned that mock examinations in the link modules will be introduced for sixth-year students from this year. This is commended.

#### **4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Senior management is supportive of the LCVP and a co-ordinator and core team have been put in place to co-ordinate and support the implementation of the programme.
- Teachers are facilitated and encouraged to undertake professional development courses.
- The LCVP benefits from a good level of resource provision and teachers and students have appropriate access to information and communication technology (ICT).
- Students have access to a comprehensive range of LCVP resources on the school's Moodle site.
- Staff is appropriately deployed to the programme.
- There is open access to the LCVP for all students and parents and students are well informed on the programme.
- Good links have been established with local employers, voluntary and community organisations and third-level colleges.
- The LCVP plan is a comprehensive document and a valuable resource for the LCVP team.
- The co-ordinator is committed to the LCVP and has worked hard in leading planning for the enhanced implementation of the programme in the school.
- Preparation of students for work experience is thorough and good arrangements are in place to support the work experience programme.
- An appropriate plan has been developed for the LCVP language module.
- There was evidence of appropriate planning for the lessons observed.
- Teaching and learning were most effective where there was an appropriate balance between teacher and student input.
- Students showed a good level of knowledge and understanding of key themes and concepts.
- Very good practices are in place for the monitoring and correction of students' portfolio work.

As a means of building on these strengths the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that formal timetabled involvement of the guidance department be implemented to support the delivery of the LCVP curriculum.
- Full responsibility for any one class group should be allocated to the same teacher for all elements of the course.
- An annual review of the LCVP should be conducted to support the ongoing implementation and enhancement of the programme.
- Common programmes of work and common assessment should be developed for the link modules.
- In line with syllabus guidelines it is recommended that an additional class period be assigned to fifth-year students for the link modules.

- The LCVP team should facilitate increased enterprise activities for students both inside and outside of the school.
- Assessment procedures for the theory elements of the link modules should be carried out in line with those in place for all other subjects at senior cycle.