

Leaving Certificate Applied

A look into the current provision of LCA in schools

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) was introduced to schools in 1995 and has enjoyed considerable success. The structure of the programme and the teaching and learning methods used contribute to some students achieving a Leaving Certificate who might otherwise have left school without a qualification. In the words of one LCA graduate:

'If I hadn't done the LCA I wouldn't have stayed to do the normal Leaving. I wouldn't be where I am now, to be honest. I said that before I went in to do the Applied Leaving and I said that in my interview to get into the Applied Leaving, that if I didn't get into it I wasn't staying, because I can't handle pressure'.

Teachers report that the students grow in confidence and self-esteem over the course of the two years of the programme and students report that LCA contributed positively to their experience of school. An LCA graduate puts the change in her level of confidence down to the teaching methods used in the LCA when she says:

'...because in first second and third year, it was constantly opening the books and the teacher talking, writing down things and studying, and that wasn't having conversations and getting involved in different things, different tasks, and in LCA you do work experience and the trade fair, key assignments and getting into groups, talking, doing different activities, like the trade fair, eh, it was talking out in class as well'.

LCA as a senior cycle programme

LCA students make up about seven percent of the Leaving Certificate cohort in any year and this figure has remained relatively stable over the period since 2003. As it is national educational policy to increase the numbers completing senior cycle education it is timely to look at the provision of, and issues surrounding, this programme.

Who is a typical LCA student?

The LCA programme would appear to cater for students who have experienced difficulties with their schoolwork, who are at risk of early school leaving, and who have disengaged academically and have had negative experiences of school. LCA take-up is strongly related to ability grouping during the junior cycle; thirty-four percent of students receiving learning support in third year go on to take LCA, as compared with three percent of other students. While all these factors enhance the likelihood of entering LCA, the majority of students in these categories still take other Leaving Certificate programmes. The pathway taken by students reflects the programmes provided in the school they attend. The LCA programme is more commonly provided in larger schools catering to more disadvantaged populations. Their pathway also reflects school policy regarding LCA entry, as well as individual student choice.

Where to for LCA students?

Graduates of the LCA have relatively low levels (twenty-eight percent) of progression to further study (higher education and further education). This rate is only slightly higher than those leaving school during senior cycle. However the good news is that LCA graduates have much lower unemployment rates than those leaving school prior to the completion of senior cycle.

Further studies

As it's over ten years since the LCA was introduced in schools, the NCCA is developing a paper looking at the provision of the programme and aspects within it which may need to be reviewed or changed. The ESRI are also currently completing research commissioned by the NCCA on students' experience of, and progression from, the LCA programme. The NCCA is, in addition, working with a group of schools exploring how different subjects, courses and modules from the various senior cycle programmes can be combined into more flexible learning profiles (FLPs) or personalised programmes of study in senior cycle. Each of these areas of work will contribute to reflection during 2009 on how far the LCA has come and how it should be shaped for the future.

You can find out more about the LCA and this work at www.ncca.ie/seniorcycle