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# Senior Cycle Developments: Flexible Learning Profiles

Progress report

October 2009



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# 1. Introduction

This report follows on from an earlier report, *Senior Cycle Developments: Update on Flexible Learning Profiles* (NCCA 2008) in which the background to the initiative is outlined and an account of the work from September 2006 to December 2008 is presented. The purpose of this report is to give an update on the work to date and to outline the direction the initiative is taking up to 2010. In addition, some ideas emerging from the initiative are presented in order to stimulate discussion and debate around leading and supporting change in schools.

The Flexible Learning Profiles (FLPs) initiative commenced in 2006 with eight DEIS<sup>1</sup> schools. It arose out of the response of the Department of Education and Science to *Proposals for the Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland* (NCCA, 2005). The NCCA's consultation on senior cycle had found strong support for building on the strengths of the current senior cycle while affirming the need to focus on the learning and the learner as well as on 'getting the Leaving'. This is a school-based curriculum development initiative that involves working with schools on thinking about and developing flexible learning profiles for senior cycle students, which would serve to improve retention rates in senior cycle and ensure a rewarding experience and improved outcomes for all.

In this context, **flexibility** means offering students choice in the areas of study that they can engage with at senior cycle. A **learning profile** is made up of the areas of learning students choose and how the learner can be supported in their learning within those areas. This profile is personalised in that schools place learners' aptitudes and interests at the forefront of all curriculum planning. The significance of this is that *schools* develop and take ownership of solutions to questions around early school leaving and students' experience of education in senior cycle. The process of developing FLPs while being supported by NCCA is happening at the site of change in the schools and classrooms of the students who are at the centre of the changes. The solutions come from the schools and the students.

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<sup>1</sup> The action plan for Educational Inclusion - DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) – focuses on educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second level education (3-18 years).

When it commenced, the initiative was targeted at learners at risk of dropping out of school but as work with the schools progressed, the view emerged that *all* senior cycle learners would benefit from the kind of thinking and planning associated with flexible learning profiles. Schools did not want another ‘programme’ in senior cycle that would add to the ring fencing of groups of learners. In addition, from consulting with their staff and students they were confronted with the reality of their students’ experience in senior cycle and the quality of that experience. This question of quality of experience was a key motivating factor in their decision to develop FLPs for all senior cycle learners. Therefore the initiative is not about developing another programme at senior cycle; rather it is exploring ways of introducing genuine flexibility and choice into senior cycle.

Phase one of the initiative commenced in May 2006. This phase involved schools looking at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate results, attendance patterns and programme information in order to analyse current provision. It also involved evaluating parents’ evenings, talking to programme coordinators, pastoral care tutors and so on. Schools also carried out student consultations on students’ experience in senior cycle. The schools then developed prototype FLPs. To assist schools in sharing ideas and networking a Moodle site was set up for the initiative. Schools set about examining how they could improve the experience of every learner in senior cycle. What would this take at an instructional and organisational level within the school? What role has parents, students, teachers and leaders to play in this changed senior cycle? What administrative changes are needed? What structural changes are needed? What professional development do teachers need to become better at what they do? How does a school know what changes are needed? How do they go about examining current practice? These are just some of the questions that faced FLP teams<sup>2</sup> in their schools, some of which were answered in the first phase of the work when schools consulted with students, teachers and management and set about developing FLPs with mission statements, guiding principles, defining features, aims and so on in an attempt to put their thinking on paper.

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<sup>2</sup> Each school nominated a liaison person to lead the process in the school and to act as liaison between school and NCCA. A team of between four to six people was formed to work with the liaison person on the initiative. This school team met once a month.

This report illustrates the steps the schools took towards implementing some of their thinking from phase one of the initiative. Section two of the report outlines the work completed between December 2008 and May 2009. Six case studies are described in this section. Section three describes the context of the initiative and some reflections on change and outcomes from the process of developing FLPs are presented.





## 2. Working with schools on FLPs

There are currently six schools working on FLPs. Two others started the work in 2006, but one withdrew in May 2007 and another in June 2008, due to personnel changes and work commitments respectively. Appendix 1 gives a list of the schools involved.

In phase one of this initiative each school developed prototype FLPs outlining their mission statements, guiding principles, defining features and aims. In addition, they looked at teaching and learning, areas of learning and curriculum planning. This work culminated in schools developing curriculum planning grids which outline the areas of learning for example, literacy, numeracy, arts, science and technology, vocational education, personal, social and moral education and life skills. See Appendix 6 for a sample Curriculum Planning Grid. In each area of learning the schools looked at possible options that the student might choose in a given area from Leaving Certificate subjects, transition units, Leaving Certificate Applied courses, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme link modules, work based learning, community based learning, FETAC awards and so on. See Appendix 5 for a sample prototype Flexible Learning Profile.

Arising from this first phase of the initiative, schools identified a number of areas of work for further attention and development. These included

- the development of learning portfolios
- using ICT to support teaching and learning
- building on links with the local community for developing learning opportunities
- developing better guidance procedures
- using key skills to support more personalised teaching and learning
- exploring more flexible approaches to the organisation of schooling.

A common strand running through these areas of work was the need to focus on the quality of teaching and learning and the need to ensure that each learner had the opportunity to benefit from this learning and have a fulfilling experience of senior cycle. Schools were impatient to 'try something out' and were concerned that it would require major change at school level and system level to be able to implement the FLPs in their entirety. The focus of the work shifted to schools planning to implement aspects of their

FLPs in September 2009. The first step in this process was to ascertain if their thinking on FLPs was in line with that of their students. To this end schools carried out another student consultation, this time focused on the FLPs and curriculum grids.

## 2.1 Student consultation

Having developed a prototype Flexible Learning Profile each school went back to the students and held focus group discussions with them on the main ideas in the FLPs. They asked students to look at the curriculum grid and to comment on whether it provided the choice that they would like to see at senior cycle. A lot of what the students have to say in this consultation echoes findings from other research such as the ESRI<sup>3</sup> research into LCA and on early school leavers. However, what is different in this consultation is that the feedback is being collected by teachers in *their own schools* in real time, so can be acted on in context. In the process, schools are using knowledge and research to inform their practice. Again, as echoed in the first phase of the work, the schools found this a very valuable exercise.

*The student consultation went really well, it was very enlightening and revealed a lot of valuable information. The students were very impressed with being consulted and cited this process as evidence of how they are treated differently at senior cycle (Liaison person).*

Clearly, students like to be asked for their opinions. However, they also like to see that their opinions are being acted on. They want change to happen quickly. In all the consultations, they voiced concern that not enough had happened since the last consultation.

*What is this going to lead to and will there be any changes due to this meeting? What happened after the last time you talked to us? Is all this going to happen after we have left, are other students going to benefit because of us?*

The students still voiced the same concerns about the Leaving Certificate, that it was overly reliant on reading and writing and rote learning. Even in practical subjects there was a greater emphasis on theory than the practical work. Some lamented that there was no PE in senior cycle and that all the emphasis was on points and college.

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<sup>3</sup> This research on LCA and the study on early school leaving will be published in 2010.

*You just go from class to class and read or write all the time, every teacher thinks their subject is the only one, it is head wrecking! We have a triple woodwork and it is too long when you have to do theory for three classes. You go from having no homework in TY to loads in fifth year; it is too big a jump.*

In one of the schools, the students talked about the pressure they felt.

*The worst thing about the leaving is stress, maths, pressure, Irish and too much learning off.*

*Everybody thinks it's (the Leaving) the worst thing in the world, it is hell in your room all the time studying, you get depressed over it, people going mad over it, teachers are freaking out and panicking.*

When asked what could be done to relieve the pressure they had the following suggestions.

*Break up the Leaving Cert, let people build up grades, you should be able to have some exams in the end of fifth year, why all the pressure for one exam? Let us use computers to help us learn, everything is about computers, you know you can study on computers. We do not have enough choices in the Leaving, the new grid is great, and it has First Aid, music, computers, history, drama ...*

There were some positive comments about the Leaving Certificate. They usually focused on the enhanced relationships with teachers and social aspects of learning in senior cycle.

*People look up to you, they ask you for advice. Teachers are more inclined to help you. Different relationship with the teachers, you are given more responsibility, respect and trusted. More opportunities to get involved in things like the school bank, Gluais, Gaisce and extra curricular activities.*

In most of the consultations with students, relationships were frequently cited as very important, relationships with teachers and with their classmates. Most students liked that they got to choose their subjects and mainly got to pick subjects they liked. In some schools due to small numbers, the choice was very limited and this was of some concern to students. They questioned why their school did not get to offer history, music or physical education to senior cycle students.

Observations cited in the previous consultation around Leaving Certificate Applied arose again such as

*.....it is great how you can build up credits and there is loads of group work and talking. Good that your attitude and attendance is part of the course. You really get to know all the class because there are only 12 of us (LCA, student).*

Students liked continuous assessment and building up credits. They liked the social aspects of the course with the emphasis on active and participatory learning. However, in tandem with this positive commentary, they also highlighted the shortcomings of the LCA as currently organised in some schools.

*We go too slowly, there is just not enough to do especially in maths and communications. It is like baby stuff. Most of the course could be followed in one year and I can't see why I can't go into the Leaving Cert maths, I was good at maths in Junior Cert. Some classes are just so boring (LCA student).*

This view was echoed by some teachers. One school carried out a survey of all teachers in LCA, and mathematics and communications were cited as subjects where students lost interest and did not feel challenged enough.

In all schools the curriculum grids were well received with students reporting that the choices were *great, really interesting*. However, they always seemed to come back to practicalities and questioned whether they would get

*a Leaving at the end of it all. It is all very well doing car mechanics and First Aid, I would love that but I have to get a job and need to get to college for that or be able to do a PLC(Post Leaving Certificate Course) at least.*

Interestingly, while some students wanted PE to be added to the senior cycle timetable, when PE was available it also presented problems for some students who saw it as a waste of a double class that could have been used to study for an exam subject. Some students were prepared to give up free time to come into school if courses were available outside the school day, especially if they could get certification for such courses. Some seemed to place high value on progression and asked *if I did this course would I be able to go on to do a PLC?* In one school, the LCA student group lamented the fact that *career guidance in this school is all about college not about us*.

An outcome of this consultation was the decision of the school FLP teams to pick a small number of students and carry out a more in-depth consultation with them on the

curriculum planning grid to see if this could inform planning for implementing aspects of the FLPs. In this way, the students' choices would be more closely aligned to what the school planned for implementation.

## 2.2 Learner profiling

All the school teams met with the NCCA team in January 2009 and planned for in-depth learner profiling in their schools. In doing this exercise, schools wanted to build up a profile of the student as a learner, as an individual and a member of the school community. They wanted to probe the learning choices the student would make if given a wide choice of areas of learning. They wanted to ascertain what kind of support for learning the student would need in senior cycle and what organisational changes would be needed to provide this support. In addition, some of the schools were discussing introducing learner mentoring in senior cycle and felt this process of learner profiling would inform the skills and time needed for mentoring. They were using this exercise as a way of questioning the value of learner profiling. This exercise happened over a couple of meetings with the students in one term, ideally mentoring or profiling would happen periodically over a longer period and would be tied into learner self-assessment tasks and goal setting.

Guidelines were provided and letters of consent for students and parents were generated. The process involved

- identifying 3-5 students that would represent a range of aspirations/interests and abilities.
- seeking consent from students and their parents/guardians for involvement in the process.
- carrying out a tracking exercise on the student's learning to date – attendance, entrance results and subsequent academic results, social skills, involvement in activities and interests inside and outside school.
- consulting with the student's teachers to build up a full picture of the student's learning in different subjects.
- meeting with the individual student where the focus of the conversation was on the student's experience of school to date, what they like/dislike, their interests inside and outside of school and their hopes for the future.

- introducing the student to the curriculum planning grid developed by the team, and inviting them to take away the grid and to study the options provided towards making choices<sup>4</sup> with their parents.
- carrying out a reality-check on the student's choices – re timetabling implications, teacher's assessment of student's ability and aptitudes, resources available and so on.
- developing a senior cycle programme for each student.

Schools approached and reported on this work in different ways. In all schools the entire FLP team was involved in meeting and interviewing students and teachers. All found the process useful and enlightening. In some cases, it was apparent that the choices the student made could be accommodated within the present timetabling arrangements. In order to get a flavour of the outcomes of the process it is necessary to look at the reports the schools produced. Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 contain reports from two of the schools. The profiling exercise was very successful in highlighting the practicality of the curriculum grids and also the assumptions underpinning the inclusion of areas of learning. In some cases, the schools were made aware of areas of learning that they could be providing to students within the present arrangements.

*We learned a good deal from the profiling and from it; we were able to design a senior cycle programme that met a broad range of interests expressed by the students. The profiling of students also demonstrated some specific areas that students are interested in which could be accommodated without huge resource or timetabling implications (Liaison person).*

From the learner profiling exercise the teams set about naming the main identified needs from the student group. They then prioritised the needs and considered what it was possible to implement or explore further from September 2009 in their schools, with support from NCCA. In some cases, this planning involved several discussions as the realities of the capacity of NCCA to provide support and the schools capacity to deliver had to be revisited and negotiated. For example, one school was very interested in introducing lap-top based learning. They put considerable energy into sourcing funding from the school community for the purchasing of hardware. However, funding was not forthcoming to the extent needed; therefore, they had to revise their plan at a late stage.

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<sup>4</sup> The students were aware that this was just a 'what if' exercise

## 2.3 Implementation plans

In tandem with the student profiling, schools carried out an audit of the provision of guidance, pastoral supports, support for learning and links with the local community. In addition to the students' profiles, this information served to inform decisions around implementing aspects of the FLP for the school. The implementation plans are works in progress and will change as the year progresses. In the present climate of education cutbacks schools are finding it challenging to implement some of their plans. However, they are being very resourceful in overcoming these challenges. Links and partnerships are being formed between schools offering different FETAC awards in one instance and in another between a school and a third level institution on the development and hosting of e-learning portfolios. This section sets out an outline of each school's prototype FLP and their plans for this year.

### 2.3.1 Case Study 1

This is an urban co-educational school with 160 students enrolled at present. The school offers Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year, Leaving Certificate and FETAC awards to 60 adult learners. The liaison person is the deputy Principal and the team also includes the TY coordinator and a teacher involved in key skills initiative.

#### **Main elements of Flexible Learning Profile**

##### **Mission statement**

To provide students with a holistic education through a collaborative learning process that fosters care, respect, equality, fairness and accountability.

##### **Guiding principles**

**Teaching and learning** will be student centred, recognising the range of abilities, experiences and needs of the participants. Every effort will be made to accommodate the preferred learning styles of the students through the use of a variety of teaching approaches. A focus on key skills will help motivate and enthuse students and ensure a more student centred classroom.

**Respectful relationships.** Positive student teacher relationships will be fostered through a partnership approach to teaching and learning and through ongoing consultation with the students about what they learn and how they learn. Positive reinforcement and feedback will promote mutual trust and respect as well as a more collaborative teaching and learning experience for all.

Setting up **individual educational plans** is fundamental to the success of FLPs. The target year group is our current third year cohort. There is a wide range of abilities and aptitudes within this group, from students who aspire to and have the ability to progress to Level 8 degrees from their Leaving Certificate to students who need learning support. To achieve equality of outcome and to ensure that each student's needs and potential are fulfilled, a personalised approach to learning with adequate support structures will be adopted.

**Support for learning** and an understanding of the learning process by students is a core principle of FLPs. This will be put into practice through mentoring students, developing awareness of different learning styles and by involving students in the design and evaluation of their learning.

**Equality** of outcome is a guiding principle. This school will ensure that all students are given the opportunity to fully develop their potential both academically and personally when partaking in FLPs.

### **Defining features**

**Flexible timetabling.** A flexible approach to school organisation is a necessary requirement to accommodate guest speakers, out of school activities, work experience, community based learning, field trips etc.

Recognition of and promotion of **Multiple Intelligences** will promote respect for individual differences and provide all learners with opportunities to excel and achieve their potential across a wide range of learning experiences.

**Networking** with local agencies, businesses and organisations will be promoted in all FLPs to supplement and enhance the learning experiences of students.



**Research based learning** and the use of portfolios will be used extensively to promote independent learning and creativity, and will foster and promote the skills and attitudes to prepare the students for life long learning. Cooperative learning will be promoted in teaching and learning.

**Key skills** will be integrated into all the areas of learning. Higher order thinking will be promoted in all learning.

**Certification** and evaluation of the FLPs will aim to provide learners with clear progression routes.

**Students** will have a greater say in what and how they learn and this will inform their FLP. We believe that by respecting students and encouraging their participation they will become more motivated and autonomous learners.

#### **Aims of FLP**

- to provide meaningful, satisfying and appropriately challenging learning experiences for all the students involved
- to increase the retention in education of at risk and significantly under achieving students
- to provide students with the skills and qualifications to enable them to access further education, training or employment so they will be able to continue learning throughout their lives
- to develop a partnership approach with all the relevant stakeholders, the students, their parents, the staff of the College, the DES and the wider community. Students will become aware that learning is not just what is done in school but rather that learning is on going and that it impacts all the areas of their lives
- *every child should have access to quality play, sport, recreational and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood* (Towards 2016). It is a fundamental aim of FLPs to provide each student with the appropriate learning and curricular opportunities to achieve this.

## **Plan for September 2009**

Our objective is to foster and develop a more flexible and personalised approach to teaching and learning in senior cycle. A lot of the defining features outlined above can be achieved through a new approach to teaching and learning, such as research based learning, multiple intelligences, and integration of ICT and the promotion of higher order thinking. Key skills will be used as the framework for changing teaching and learning.

The embedding of key skills across senior cycle will include the following steps

- key skills workshop for the whole staff on Sept 1<sup>st</sup> with a follow up in Oct/Nov and Feb/Mar to monitor progress, allow feedback, tease out any problems and maintain momentum in the process
- consult with and get feedback from students on their experiences of the process
- develop a template to track students' progress in developing key skills
- set up monthly buddy meetings amongst staff to encourage collaboration around the embedding of key skills.

The fostering of an awareness of learning styles in the students and the promotion of learning strategies to help them become more independent will include the following steps

- continue to refine a template for profiling the needs and aptitudes of all students
- each TY student will meet with a Learning Coach/Mentor on a regular basis throughout the year to support, motivate and enhance the student's learning strategies
- in tandem with personalised support, the students will also be taught two new transition units specially tailored to the initiative. The first TU entitled '*Learn Smart*' focuses on the individual to help them become more aware of their strengths and learning preferences and how they can become more active and independent learners. The second TU entitled '*It's your future: Exploring options in further and higher education and training*' is aimed at preparing students to consider their options for the future and begin planning towards achieving their goals.

In addition, the team will

- begin the process of building student portfolios. To support this FETAC level 4 Computing and Information Technology will be incorporated into the TY programme
- involve parents more in the initiative through meetings and eliciting feedback from them.

## 2.3.2 Case Study 2

This school is an urban single sex boys' school with 280 students enrolled at present. The school offers Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied and FETAC awards to adult learners. The Deputy Principal is the liaison person; the team is made up of TY coordinator, teachers involved in the key skills initiative and Chaplain.

### **Main elements of Flexible Learning Profile**

#### **Mission statement**

The school believes that education can be provided in a holistic way, which will enable our students to grow academically, spiritually, psychologically and socially. FLPs will provide a flexible and personalised approach to learning in support of students developing this potential. We will endeavor to develop this learning space in support of raising standards by focusing teaching and learning on student interests and abilities. We will endeavor to work as partners to develop connections between the in-school provision of education, local institutes, the wider community and the daily reality of our student's lives.

#### **Guiding principles**

**Learner centred:** FLPs will place the student at the centre of the learning experience and will provide a range of relevant, engaging and challenging curriculum options appropriate to the student's aptitude, interests and needs.

**Positive relationship:** FLPs will foster a positive and respectful relationship between all involved in support of developing a successful teaching and learning experience.

**Student voice:** The student voice will be central in the development and evaluation of their individual FLP. In encouraging a partnership approach to learning it is intended to make the learning experience more relevant, to better motivate the student and to support the student in the development of independent learning skills.

**Learning experience:** FLPs will recognise individual difference and will provide students with a meaningful and challenging learning experience in which individuals can develop academically, spiritually and socially.

**Equality:** The FLP will seek to promote equality of access, equality of participation and equality of opportunity for all students. The FLP is intended for all students entering senior cycle. All students will be supported to fully participate in a challenging and enriching curriculum, which will provide meaningful progression routes to further education and training opportunities.

### **Defining features**

**Choice:** FLP will provide students with a range of curriculum options and learning experiences drawn from within and from beyond the school. The school will aim to engage with the wider community in developing a range of relevant educational experiences.

**Personalised learning:** FLP will provide a positive learning experience for the learner. This will be facilitated through an emphasis on assessment for learning, continuous assessment, self assessment, feedback, goal setting and reflection on learning. In developing an FLP, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) will be developed for each student based on an evaluation of the student's strengths and weaknesses. The IEP will be developed and reviewed as a collaborative effort between the learner, the FLP co-ordinator and the relevant members of the FLP team. The IEP will establish specific learning goals, identify the teaching strategies, resources and supports required to achieve these goals. The IEP will be subject to ongoing review in support of maintaining the student at the centre of the learning process and ensuring the validity of the target progression route.

**Key skills:** The FLP will utilise a key skills approach to curriculum presentation and evaluation and will utilise a wide range of active teaching methodologies in support of curriculum delivery.

**Assessment and certification:** The FLP will provide students with the facility to seek certification from a range of awarding bodies including SEC (LC and LCA) and FETAC. It is envisaged that these qualifications will be combined into a single record of achievement which will facilitate the student in following a progression route to further study, further training or directly to employment.

**Flexible school organisation:** The school will aim to support the FLP by providing a flexible timetable to facilitate work based learning, out of school learning experiences (incl. community based learning), supported independent learning skills development and study programmes, integrated guidance/mentoring programme, and other relevant learning opportunities.

**Information and Communication Technologies:** The FLP will place ICT at the core of the teaching and learning experience. ICT will assist the student to develop competence and confidence in the progression of their educational goals and to access broader learning opportunities. Appropriate ICT will be used in support of:

- curriculum delivery,
- enhancing the student learning experience,
- providing appropriate learning supports,
- promotion of collaborative learning,
- providing a significant motivation for student learning,
- in facilitating monitoring and assessment.

ICT will support the management of the student's learning experience through supporting the goals established in the IEP, providing access to additional resources in support of independent learning and by providing electronic access to support from relevant FLP team members as required.

### **Aims of FLP**

- to provide a positive and relevant learning environment in which students have the opportunity to experience success

- to encourage the development of independent learning skills in support of promoting awareness of lifelong learning
- to encourage the formation and development of personal and social skills, as well as academic skills which will reflect the different needs, interests and aptitudes of all students
- to motivate and challenge students to achieve their potential in a student centred environment
- to foster partnerships between the students, the school, parents and the wider community in support of educational development.

### **Plan for September 2009**

Our objective is to investigate how ICT can best support more flexible and personalised learning within the context of FLPs.

Specific aims are

- to use ICT to support the embedding of key skills within teaching and learning
- to use ICT to support learning through the development of e-learning portfolios for the students
- develop links with Cork Institute of Technology around designing and developing an e-learning portfolio for the school.

E- learning portfolios will comprise five aspects.

- **Me** – a profile of the student's interests, likes/dislikes, hobbies and interests, classroom relationships, events, dreams and aspirations.
- **Learning log** - is a reflection on their own learning and how they feel they are progressing in each of their subjects. This provides an insight into the learner's perception of what they see as barriers to their learning, areas that they have found interesting, areas they would like more help on, the degree of interest and so on. Learners will need to be coached for this section on how to write about their learning.
- **Showcase of learning** - online repository allowing learners to archive a range of highlights of their learning and evidence of key skills developed.
- **Time-management tools and target setting** - here learners keep track of their different projects, assignments, linked to personal effectiveness and career.
- **Feedback and assessment for learning** – this is where the learning mentor will give feedback and feed forward to the student.

Appropriate ICT will be used in support of

- curriculum delivery
- enhancing the student learning experience
- promotion of collaborative learning
- providing a significant motivation for student learning
- facilitating monitoring and assessment
- providing appropriate learning supports
- maintaining a record of students' achievement.

### 2.3.3 Case study 3

This is an urban school with 500 female students enrolled at present. The school offers Junior Certificate, Transition Year, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Leaving Certificate Applied. The Principal is the liaison person and the team includes TY coordinator and other teachers.

#### **Main elements of Flexible Learning Profile**

##### **Mission statement**

Our Flexible Learning Profiles aim to ensure that students will have an experience of learning that will be based on understanding their strengths and weaknesses and structuring learning around them. FLPs will result in the student experience of school being a positive one and will make our school serve students in a more comprehensive way. FLPs will offer our school an opportunity to take a whole school approach to innovative teaching and learning and in this way improve standards in all areas.

##### **Guiding principles**

**Student centred:** Each student's FLP will be designed in such a way as to recognise individual student's abilities, needs and interests. By using a variety of teaching methodologies different learning styles will be catered for. Integration of the five key skills will ensure that all learning is student centred.

**Flexibility:** FLPs will be flexible in all aspects including curriculum design, curriculum delivery, in school and out of school delivery and how we use learning spaces. Flexibility in the structure of the school day and week will be essential to accommodate the student centred nature of FLPs.

**Equality:** FLPs will be open to all senior cycle students. Students will be empowered to participate fully in what will be a challenging and enriching curriculum. On completion, students should be able to avail of a choice of opportunities to progress further in education and training.

**Partnership/linkage:** FLPs will require the development of partnership and linkage between the school and the wider community. Other educational establishments may become providers of elements of FLPs. Work based learning linkages will be an important feature.

### **Defining features**

**Student mentoring and support:** Pre senior cycle mentoring and ongoing mentoring will be provided to identify student strengths and weaknesses and monitor and support progress.

**Personalised learning plans:** Individual student learning plans will be key in identifying and ensuring achievement of personalised learning goals.

Use of the **wider community** as a learning base: Meaningful work based learning, community awareness and attendance at courses provided by other learning centres will feature in our FLPs. Forming linkages between our school and these centres will be an initial important step and one that should expand as the years progress.

**Integration of ICT** as a teaching and learning tool: Use of ICT in both teaching and learning will be developed and expanded. Using ICT to create, communicate and collaborate to produce and organise information, to manage learning enquiry, accessing and assessing information, problem solving and in the presentation of data.

**Collaborative relationship** between partners - students, teachers and parents will be nurtured and promoted throughout the implementation of FLPs.

Innovative approaches to **teaching and learning** including the use of ICT and a focus on the key skills will inform and underpin our approaches to teaching and learning.



Students will be encouraged to become **more independent learners** who understand what they are learning and why, who share in the planning of learning and evaluate its outcomes. In this way they will grow in self-awareness, self esteem and confidence.

### **Aims of FLP**

- to develop the confidence and competence of each individual learner using teaching and learning strategies that are based on individual needs
- to raise standards by focusing teaching and learning in a way that is based on the interests and aptitudes of the students
- to provide a worthwhile learning experience that will bridge the gap between school and working life
- to provide a variety of curriculum elements which will be relevant to student needs
- to develop students ability to direct and take control of their own learning
- to encourage students to reach their full potential
- to ensure that students leave school with a sense of self worth and pride in their achievements.

### **Plan for September 2009**

Our objective is to expand the choice for LCA students and to promote integration among LC and LCA.

Consultations with the LCA team concluded that the LCA programme does not provide sufficient challenge and content to hold the interests of the students. In addition, the ring-fencing of LCA has ghettoised these students. In this context, the team have been attempting to break down the barriers between LCA students and LC established students for some time with the aim of encouraging greater social integration amongst the senior cycle students.

Initiatives taken to date include:

- the integration of LCA and LC students for some classes (PE, RE, SPHE) and for a range of extracurricular activities
- the introduction of a mentoring programme for LCA students to ascertain their needs and support them in all aspects of learning

- each LCA student is keeping a personal journal of learning and this is being monitored by the LCA coordinator so as to keep learners on track and to identify earlier if learners are 'switching off' learning or bored with subjects.

During 2009-2010, the specific plan is to expand the curriculum in order to provide greater choice and challenge for LCA students and to promote further social integration of students which includes

- 5<sup>th</sup> Year LCA students will be able to access a choice of FETAC awards provided by local Colleges of Further Education, beginning with 'Customer Services' in Crumlin College
- 6<sup>th</sup> yr LCA students will also be offered FETAC awards outside school hours
- a plan to continue to refine and develop the school's programme of student mentoring.

In 2010-2011 the school hopes to open up further flexibility within senior cycle by incorporating Maths and English, established Leaving Certificate subjects into LCA. It is currently not possible to do this due to the SEC examination timetable.

### 2.3.4 Case study 4

This school is in a small rural town and is a co-educational school with 235 students enrolled at present. The school offers Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied and FETAC awards to adult learners. The liaison person has been one of two teachers at various times both of whom are key skills teachers; the team consists of the Principal, deputy Principal, LCA coordinator, LCVP coordinator.

#### **Main elements of Flexible Learning Profile**

##### **Mission statement**

In a caring and innovative school, we are dedicated to fostering educational excellence, empowering all students to reach their full potential – academic and social, physical and spiritual. Through partnership, flexibility, adaptability and co-operation we openly respect and nurture the dignity and uniqueness of each individual.

### **Guiding principles**

**Flexibility:** The curriculum will be adapted to suit the interests, needs and aptitudes of the individual learner. We intend to move from a static learning environment to a dynamic, active way of learning within the school and community. A range of curriculum components, resources and teaching approaches will enable our teachers to meet the learners' needs by tailoring the curriculum to suit the students' individual abilities and talents.

**Catering to the individual:** We recognise learners have a variety of talents, aspirations and needs and we will aim to develop FLPs geared towards these individual needs.

**Student centred:** Teaching and learning will be student centred recognising the range of abilities, experience and needs of the participants. Priority will be given to the learner rather than the curriculum. A focus on key skills will help motivate and enthuse students and ensure a more student centred approach.

**Personal responsibility:** Encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning is an aim of the FLP; this will be actively supported by significant support for learning. We recognise the need for positive parental involvement in supporting students' engagement in their learning.

**Equality:** No student will be excluded on the basis of gender, cultural background or special educational needs. Students whose first language is not English will be fully supported in their learning. Students will be encouraged to participate fully in their own education which will lead to successful outcomes and will open up opportunities for further education and training.

**Community based learning:** This involves a partnership with students, parents and the local community. In addition to school based learning students will have access to a wider learning experience such as work experience, online courses and relevant FETAC awards.

The school and community will act as an open ended campus with students having the advantage of using organisations outside school to advance their FLPs. Students will

be given the opportunity to meet and discuss progression routes with people who work in areas of interest to them within the wider community.

**Respectful and positive relationships:** The school fosters positive honest, courteous and respectful relationships within the school community. We recognise the variety of differences that exist between students and the need to seek to accommodate these differences.

### **Defining features**

**Partnership with the community:** A partnership approach will be developed to include links with local organisations, individual members of the community and third level colleges. Students will also have access to the wider community to progress their education.

**Flexible school organisation:** Students will not be tied to the traditional timetable but instead will have flexibility included in their school week. The use of different learning environments that are motivating and inviting to learners will provide a suitable stimulus for experiencing the fun, challenge and success of learning.

**Appropriate assessment:** A broader range of assessment approaches will be offered - focusing more on continuous assessment, self and peer assessment, portfolios, etc. There will be a strong focus on formative assessment (AfL) including feedback, target setting and encouraging students to reflect on their learning.

**Personalised learning:** The content of the FLP will be determined by the needs, talents and abilities of the participating students. This will raise standards by focusing teaching and learning on the aptitudes and interests of the students. There will be adequate provision of significant personalised support for learning which will require additional resources. There will be more emphasis on hearing the students' voice and encouraging them as partners in their own learning rather than spectators.

**Clear progression routes:** The pursuit of excellence leading to recognised qualifications and clear progression pathways will be a feature of each student's FLP. More emphasis will be put on career guidance than is currently available. Learners will

be encourages to gain a foothold on and progress their learning with reference to the National Framework of Qualifications.

**Use of ICT:** ICT will be fully integrated into the curriculum, as a subject and within other subjects. Wherever possible, students will be encouraged to make use of new and existing technologies to carry out their studies. ICT will also be used to facilitate the support and monitoring of student learning through the use of ePortal, IEPs, etc.

**Love of learning:** Students will be provided with meaningful, relevant and challenging learning experiences that promote independence, enable them to grow holistically, and help build the confidence and skills of each learner. This in turn will foster a love of learning for those involved in the FLP.

**Teaching and learning:** The use of a wide range of teaching and learning approaches will be implemented throughout the school. Key skills will be a significant feature of each student's FLP. These approaches will motivate learners to help them see the value of what they are learning and provide them with thinking skills and learning strategies so they become more aware of themselves as learners.

### **Aims of FLP**

- to provide a positive, relevant, inclusive and meaningful experience for all participants
- to develop individual talents and target individual learning needs of all learners
- to motivate all learners to reach their potential academically and enable them to succeed in the wider community through the development of social and personal skills
- to provide learners with the skills and qualifications to enable them access further education, training or employment and be able to continue learning throughout their lives.

### **Plan for September 2009**

During 2009-2010, our overall objective is to prepare staff and students for involvement in Flexible Learning Profiles for the academic year 2010/11 through the development of ICT in the classroom and continued support in the use of key skills.

- To continue integrating key skills throughout the school. The staff has been involved in a whole school induction of key skills since Feb 2009. As part of this learning process, there were regular buddy meetings to allow time for evaluation and sharing of ideas. These buddy meetings will take a different format next year. Rather than using whole staff meetings, staff will be assigned to groups based on subject area. Each member of the current FLP team will be assigned to different subject groups to provide support and assistance and to feedback to the key skills co-ordinator. A key skills blog has been set up where teachers can post their experiences weekly and get feedback. It is hoped that this will provide a useful resource for sharing ideas.
- To further develop use of ICT in the classroom, all students will be given access to a class set of laptops. Access to IT is an integral step to the development of key skills especially with the proposal of introducing e-portfolios. Staff will require IT support and training to support use of laptops in the classroom.
- To introduce a greater degree of flexibility within senior cycle programmes, two FETAC level 4 modules will be introduced into the fifth year LCA programme. The fifth year LCA group will take FETAC level 5 Health related fitness as part of their health and Recreation module. The sixth year LCA group will take FETAC Level 5 Computer Applications as part of the IT coursework. Both LCA groups will participate in a GAA coaching course during October and the Order of Malta will run a Basic First Aid course after Halloween.
- To mentor students in third year in order to identify their academic needs for senior cycle. Students will be given extra career guidance to help them determine career paths and appropriate subject choices to enable them to fulfil their goals.
- To establish a list of subject requirements and community links required for academic year 2010/11 by January 2010 to allow sufficient time for planning.

- To provide training and support to the staff members who will have a key role in mentoring students through the FLP. Staff who will be involved in the FLP will be consulted and appropriate training/support provided.
- To give parents information on the difference between FLP and current senior cycle options, develop systems to involve parents more in supporting their child in their learning.

## Case study 5

This school is a co-educational school with 47 second level students enrolled at present. The school offers Junior Certificate, JCSP, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and FETAC awards to adult learners. The liaison person is the deputy Principal and the team consists of the LCVP coordinator and two teachers.

### **Main elements of Flexible Learning Profiles**

#### **Mission statement**

This school is informed by a community service ethos and accordingly is open to all members of the community irrespective of age, gender, academic ability, class or creed. FLPs will provide all students with the opportunity to participate in education that will be meaningful, engaging and challenging. FLPs will act as a vision that will inspire the school to move forward in providing a more flexible and personalised education for the 21st century.

#### **Guiding principles**

**Flexibility:** There will be a flexible curriculum that allows for student choice relevant to the students particular interests and aptitudes and in response to social and technological change.

**Personalised learning:** A personalised approach to learning will be provided through a relevant, holistic, student centred and experiential curriculum. It is to raise standards by focusing teaching and learning on the aptitudes and interests of students.

**Partnership:** Partnerships with local enterprises and the community will be valued and incorporated into the learning process.

**Relationships:** Positive and respectful pupil/teacher relationship will be fostered through a partnership approach to teaching and learning and through a process of positive reinforcement and feedback. Positive relationships will also be promoted through more cooperative and active teaching and learning approaches.

**The Student Voice:** The student voice will be included in all aspects of planning and students will have a greater say in what and how they learn.

**Equality:** All students will be treated equally, irrespective of class creed gender or aptitude. We will strive to achieve equality of outcomes as well as equality of participation in the delivery of FLPs. FLP will be available to all students to help them open up a choice of meaningful progression routes to other education and training opportunities.

**Progression:** The pursuit of excellence leading to recognised qualifications and clear progression paths will be a feature of each student FLP.

### **Defining features**

**Autonomous learning:** Students will be encouraged to become autonomous learners who understand, what they are learning and why, who share in the planning of learning activities and who regularly review the progress of their learning and evaluate its outcomes. Thus they will grow in self esteem and confidence.

**Partnership:** Collaboration with local agencies businesses and organizations will be developed to supplement and enhance the learning experiences of our students.

**Guidance provision:** will be central to the student's progression through the learning experience.

**Assessment:** There will be a strong focus on formative assessment (AfL) including continuous assessment self assessment, portfolio assessment positive feedback, target setting and reflection on learning.



**Integration of ICT:** ICT will be an important tool in teaching and learning and will enhance the effectiveness of learning, provide significant motivation for student learning, and facilitate collaborative learning. In addition it will facilitate the support and monitoring of student learning through the IEP, e-Portfolios, learning diaries, learning blogs, etc.

**Mutually respectful relationships:** Active promotion of mutually respectful relationships between all participants - parents, teachers and students – will be a feature of school life. The voice of the learner will be valued. Educational programmes will seek the learners suggestions on ways to make the learning personalised. Small groups can facilitate strong teacher- student relationships built on trust and respect.

### **Aims of FLP**

- to increase the retention in education of at risk and significantly under achieving students
- to provide students with the opportunity to become active participants in their own learning
- to enable students to become more effective and autonomous as learners.
- to provide students with the skills and qualifications to enable them access further education, training or employment and to be able to continue learning throughout their lives
- to involve all the significant partners in progressing the educational development of all the student involved
- to provide a meaningful, satisfying and appropriately challenging learning experiences for all the students involved

### **Plan for September 2009**

Objective is to build on the work with the learning school and to increase choice for students by offering new FETAC awards.

- A number of FETAC awards will be integrated into the senior cycle programme and monitored from a number of perspectives – are the FETAC awards of additional value to the students? Are they putting teachers or students under pressure in relation to completing the LC courses? What impact are the FETAC

awards having on student engagement and motivation? In addition, the question of recognition of FETAC alongside the Leaving Certificate will be discussed with the Institute of Technology Tralee.

- The Learning School project showed that specific teaching and learning strategies (such as cross-curricular learning, team-teaching, etc) could have a positive impact on both student motivation/attendance and on academic achievement. This project will be extended within the context of the FLP initiative and the learning shared with other schools.

### 2.3.6 Case study 6

This is an urban co-educational school with 380 students enrolled at present. The school offers Junior Cycle, JCSP, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied and FETAC awards to adult learners. The liaison person is a teacher; the team consists of the programmes coordinator, two year heads and teacher involved in the key skills initiative.

#### **Main elements of Flexible Learning Profile**

##### **Mission statement**

We will provide an educational experience that is relevant and diverse and that will foster the individual talents of the students at senior cycle. The programme will allow for flexibility of choice and will equip the students with a breadth of knowledge that is valuable, practical and meaningful.

##### **Guiding principles**

**Student centred:** FLPs will be tailored to meet the individual needs of the student. This will entail the provision of Individual Learning Profiles that will accommodate the different learning experiences, range of abilities, styles of learning and pace of learning of each student.

**Relevance:** FLPs will strive to make learning meaningful and relevant to the student. This was expressed by the students during the consultation process with the profile committee members. Curriculum choice will create opportunities to engage the learner and realise their potential

**Respectful relationships:** FLPs will contribute to the personal development and well-being of the learner, fostering confidence and competence in a climate of trust and mutual respect. When the students were consulted one of their main priorities was to be treated more like adults by their teachers. Students will be partners in curriculum planning and therefore will see education as a shared responsibility between students, teachers, parents and management.

### **Defining features**

**Literacy and numeracy:** FLPs recognise that the core skills of literacy and numeracy are fundamental in supporting learners to improve confidence and self esteem.

**Personalised learning:** FLPs will incorporate teaching and learning strategies that build on the individual needs of the learner. FLPs will include clearly defined outcomes with specific learning goals that are to be achieved over a set period of time.

**Learning management:** Educational and career guidance will be embedded in FLPs.

**Appropriate assessment:** FLPs will utilise a range of assessment techniques. These might include continuous assessment, terminal examinations and assessment for learning techniques.

**Clear progression routes:** A vital component of FLPs is the provision of clear progression routes through the pursuit of qualifications to prepare the learner for future study or for the world of work.

**Partnership with the Community:** FLPs will provide opportunities to bring the community into the classroom. Establishing links with local businesses, community and sporting organisations and charitable organisations can only enhance the learning of the students.

**ICT:** FLPs will be grounded in ICT so there will be a need to assess and address skill gaps among learners and relevant teachers.

**Student voice:** Students will be consulted at all stages of the process. The results and opinions of students will be considered during all stages of the planning procedure. As

a result, students will have a greater say in what and how they learn and be encouraged to become learners that are more independent.

### **Aims of FLP**

- FLPs will offer a greater variety of curriculum components in order to make senior cycle more interesting and relevant for the learner
- FLPs will strive to equip the students with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to enter the world of work or pursue further education
- FLPs will provide guidance for the learner to make appropriate learning choices and manage their learning and will be inclusive of all ranges of ability and will be sufficiently challenging
- FLPs will strive to bring the community into the classroom by establishing links with outside bodies such as local businesses, sporting and charitable organisations.

### **Plan for September 2009**

Objectives are to begin to expand the curriculum in order to provide greater choice and flexibility within senior cycle and to promote greater social integration of students and to introduce a system of student profiling and mentoring.

To expand the curriculum at senior cycle by introducing the following modules (FETAC awards) as options to all 5<sup>th</sup> yr students (both established LC and LCA)

- Information Technology Skills L4
- Computer Applications L4
- Health and Fitness L4
- Cultural Studies L4.

The above modules were selected as a response to student consultation and also based on what was identified as ways of enhancing senior cycle provision. The choice of modules will change and broaden as the need arises. As these modules will be offered to both LCA students and 5<sup>th</sup> years, it is hoped that this will contribute to the integration of all senior cycle students and reduce the ring fencing of LCA students.

To work with all 3<sup>rd</sup> year students to develop a personal profile of their strengths, interests, aptitudes and career choices. Each team member will be assigned 12-15

students (70 in total), to work with them on an ongoing basis in providing teacher-student mentoring. Students will be met once a week as a group which will be followed up by one to one mentoring.



## 3. Flexible Learning Profiles - what have we learned?

This section sets out the ideas emerging from the work on the FLPs thus far. The ideas are organised around some of the principles for leading and supporting change as detailed in the NCCA discussion document *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools* (2009). This section is organised under three headings, the context of the initiative, reflections on change and outcomes from the process for NCCA, schools, teachers and the system. These should not be treated as definitive findings or outcomes from the work, rather as emerging ideas for further consideration and discussion.

### 3.1 Context

This initiative commenced in May 2006 when the Principals of the eight schools involved were invited to have a discussion with NCCA on the development of more flexible learning pathways through senior cycle. From this initial meeting it was clear that schools were being asked to get involved in curriculum development in a way that was quite different from their previous experience. They were developing thinking in an area that was fluid but yet within the parameters of their current practice. NCCA was supporting the process but there were no pre-prepared solutions to the questions asked. While certain possibilities were discussed at this initial meeting related to curriculum components, learning environment, managing and supporting learning, flexible certification, teaching and learning, work-based learning and so on, schools developed these ideas from their own experiences and within the context of their schools. Schools were supported in putting a team together to examine policy and practice in their settings and while there was advice from NCCA as to how to organise this process, schools very much took ownership of the process themselves. As such it was a bottom up examination of practice within very fluid parameters. The principles underpinning the work included grounding the development of FLPs in the reality of school life, a commitment to explore new pathways, different pace and involvement for different schools, a holistic vision that took account of individuality and an openness to change.

The main focus of phase one of the initiative was on the development of the prototype FLPs. There were inherent challenges in looking at practice within the inherited confines of the second level school system so this process took time and required re-visiting the key ideas many times. Schools grappled with the balance between accommodating external demands related to benchmarks, the race for points and status in the community with the internal aspirations of the learners for a different educational experience. They found it difficult to reconcile flexibility with the need for learners to progress in a fairly conservative system where the gold standard is 'to get the Leaving'. There were many iterations of the prototype FLPs. However, a number of characteristics have emerged that are important and associated with all FLPs. These characteristics are based on the past experience and current thinking of schools and offer an insight into the general nature of FLPs which involves

- meeting the needs and abilities of a wide range of learners through flexibility and choice of curriculum components
- personalising the curriculum so that a fit is achieved between learners' strengths and weaknesses, their needs and lives and the curriculum choices made
- paying attention to who makes the choices and ensuring sufficient information and guidance is available for learners to be able to make choices themselves
- incorporating key skills<sup>5</sup> into teaching and learning
- using assessment approaches, such as Assessment for Learning and data and dialogue to diagnose every student's learning needs
- employing teaching and learning strategies and practices that are focused on the individual learner and can relate to individual learning needs
- using technology in education to support teaching and learning and to engage students in learning communities
- developing the physical learning environment and how learning is managed to motivate the learner to greater involvement, independence and autonomy in learning
- exploring more flexible approaches to school organisation

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<sup>5</sup> Five key skills have been identified as central to teaching and learning across the curriculum at senior cycle. These are the skills of information processing, critical and creative thinking, working with others, communicating and being personally effective.



- openness to opportunities and services beyond the classroom and the school such as work-based learning, mentoring systems and school business partnerships.

These are some of the characteristics that, in the view of those involved in the initiative, in varying combinations, characterise FLPs in the context of diversity and disadvantage. Clearly, FLPs are multi faceted and their implementation would present challenges at all levels, the classroom, the school and the education system. However, schools are optimistic about facing some of those challenges and implementing at least some aspects of their FLPs in the current school year, with the support of the NCCA.

## 3.2 Reflections on change

As outlined in the discussion paper *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools*, the view of how change does and should happen involves seeing schools, more than ever, as the key site of change. This is where most of the available resources should be applied. Greater autonomy in decision-making related to change should be afforded to schools as exemplified in this initiative. While education systems as a whole can tend to be relatively traditional, adaptive and incremental in their approach towards change, schools who are facing the immediate impact of social and economic change on a daily basis often have to be, and can be, highly innovative. The following discussion attempts to distil some of the learning from the initiative as it pertains to the more general discussion on educational change.

### **3.2.1 It takes time to achieve change**

The need for time to achieve change is linked to the need for time to make sense of the change on many levels, to puzzle what the change means for all the different people involved, for the learner, the parent, the teacher, the school, the community, the policy maker and the wider system. Evidence from the FLP schools suggests that achieving clarity of intention takes time and requires systematic revisiting of the core ideas. The teams varied in their ability to understand the concept of flexibility. Some saw it as just a re-organisation of the timetable, others as a radical re-organisation of schooling practices. Liaison people mentioned that the 'meaning making' part of their role was most difficult. They pointed to the need to revisit the purpose of the idea and to reiterate it, to reflect on their thinking and discuss it with others, to share their thinking

with other schools and so on. This was evidenced in how the initiative was originally focused on learners who are at risk of dropping out of school and then changed in response to feedback from the schools to include all senior cycle learners.

These schools had already been involved in change initiatives and understood the incremental nature of change. Schools offering FETAC awards found it easier to imagine how greater flexibility might be introduced as they were already accustomed to adult learners, to having tutors coming into the school for specific courses and so on. Schools took this work on FLPs and merged it with what was already happening in the school and hybridised the idea to suit their needs. But while some past experiences of curriculum development and change were used as a positive basis for looking at FLPs there was also evidence that previous negative experience can act as a disincentive to re-engaging with change. During the teacher consultations some voiced concern that *we have been here before with The Senior Cert, Leaving Certificate Applied, what will be different about this?* Three of the schools had teachers involved in the key skills initiative and this had a positive influence in these schools. There was a sense of success in the schools, students were talking about their learning, sharing their positive experiences as were the teachers involved. In the schools where teachers were involved in the key skills initiative, there was evidence of greater openness to examining teaching and learning. These schools played a role in 'selling' key skills to the other schools in the group. All the school teams now believe the embedding of key skills in teaching and learning is a core feature of FLPs that enhances students' ability to make choices and contributes to their becoming more independent learners, capable of managing a personalised FLP.

This initiative is now progressing into its fourth year in six of the schools; it has taken this time for the schools to be able to plan for implementing some aspects of their FLP. When schools are committed to consulting with all partners, this takes time. On some levels, there was impatience with 'blue sky' thinking and a questioning as to why the *NCCA could not just tell us what they want and let us try it out?* Time alone is not the answer, there needs to be a motivation to change. Many of the schools in this initiative would report that prior to getting involved in the work they all felt they were doing a good job in what they provided for their students. It was only when they started to consult with the students that they were confronted with the reality that some students

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were not happy with the provision in the school as echoed in the quote from a student *all you do is go from one class to another reading and writing all the time.*

Schools and teachers are very committed to providing a quality experience for their students and when they know that this quality is questioned they are motivated to change. All of the schools have expressed impatience with the pace of change; an often quoted lament during last year was *when can we do some of this? Our students are really interested.* It took time for the schools to look at their practice and to come to a point where they thought they could provide a better experience for their students. This impatience to get started on implementation was being internally generated by their students and teachers. This illustrates a dichotomy within the initiative. Where schools developed the FLPs, but looked to the outside for direction on what to implement. They did not feel they had the autonomy to make 'big' decisions. The inflexibility of the system whether real or apparent is a disincentive to change for some schools. However, this leads to real possibilities of practice outstripping policy in this context and suggests a need for more flexible policy parameters for schools in their work on curriculum planning. There was also some evidence of how schools can interpret policy in ways to suit their practice. One example is where a school found a way of loosening the approach to LCA and have LCA and LCE students in the same class for maths in year one of senior cycle. This decision was made in response to students reporting they were not challenged in LCA maths and felt it was easier than junior cycle maths.

### **3.2.2 It takes investment to achieve deep change**

Investment, both financial and non-financial, was important to this initiative. A grant of €7,500 per year was provided to each of the schools to support their work on FLPs. Schools were given the autonomy to use the grant in whatever way best supported the work in their own context. However, some suggestions were made on how the monies might be put to use, for example, to allow two classes per week planning time for the liaison person or to cover meeting time for the planning team. The allocation of this time to meet was crucial as evidenced by the following reflection from a liaison person in May 2009. *The work involved in this initiative far exceeds the two hours per week allowance given in my timetable. I could do with more time to do this role.*

The allocation of time to meet was organised in different ways in different schools. In some schools it was time tabled, in others, the teams gave of their free time to work on the initiative and the Principal provided working lunches or teas. The following reflection highlights just some of the challenges involved.

*Team meetings initially were held in school, after class time. This proved problematic for meeting the entire team as one often had to rush away. Meetings were re-scheduled within class time and substitution was put in place as required. Frequent disruptions were common and the team decided to move out of school to facilitate un-interrupted two hour meetings. Formal and informal meetings were held with other staff members to keep FLP issues alive and under discussion.*

In addition to resourcing time to meet, the liaison people met with each other in the offices of the NCCA three to four times each year. At these seminars, they were given the opportunity to share ideas and to discuss current research in many areas such as personalised learning, project based learning, the relevance of ICT, educational disadvantage, the use of ePortfolios and so on. The seminars were tailored to meet their needs and were followed up by visits to the schools. Where necessary, NCCA staff attended team meetings. The support was very much focused on leading and supporting schools in the work. To facilitate the sharing of ideas after the seminars a Moodle site was set up for the schools. The following quote encompasses many of the supports provided.

*I think the liaison team meetings are very significant for me in terms of realising that all groups have the same difficulties, the frank discussions with the others helped to ground the process for me, the data provided and outside speakers all proved very significant. I used Moodle as a resource centre to access documentation relating to the initiative. The deadlines set for work (although difficult to meet at times) were good for me.*

There was evidence also of how schools themselves can resource and incentivise change. Some schools took every opportunity to provide time and space for teams to meet. In doing so, they gave the initiative 'status' within the school, as something they felt was important. In others, the team worked very much in isolation from the rest of the school community. Clearly, where the FLP work was seen as a shared enterprise among all the staff it was most successful. Overall, the different ways in which the schools involved used and deployed the resources and investment associated with the initiative illustrate the point that each school brings its own situation, organisation and

culture to bear on how it engages with change initiatives in order to make them work. Meanwhile, change initiatives, while setting out certain tramlines for development, have to be flexible enough to accommodate the realities of schools and allow them to be innovative in this context.

### **3.2.3 Change involves leadership**

The success of this initiative required leadership from within the school on many levels involving the Principal, the liaison person and the team members. The leadership skills needed included the need to establish direction, to know and use the resources of the group, to plan and communicate effectively and to motivate and inspire the team and the whole school around the key ideas. These skills developed over the course of the initiative to different degrees for different people involved. While the support of the Principal is essential for the FLP work, it was very evident that if the liaison person took control and led the process, the role of the Principal became less important. In one case, where the liaison person moved into other work, the Principal stepped in and re-invigorated the initiative. The choice of liaison person and team was crucial to the work so the initial formation of the team was contingent on the Principals knowing their staff. This is evident in the following quote.

*Some group members were more productive than others. One was particularly negative and really didn't engage in the process, and was nit picking from beginning to end. Others were frustrated at this and even though I did try to address the issue I really didn't feel I could change the attitude of the person. I did not think this would be the situation when she asked to be a member of the team (Liaison person end of year reflections April 2008).*

There is no ideal set of people to make up the team in the schools. The liaison people had to work with the people on their team and try to use their skills to lead and develop the team. In some instances, it was good to have people on the team who questioned and challenged the thinking. The set of skills needed for the role of liaison person was somewhat underestimated by all involved. The process was most effective where the liaison person demonstrated skills around knowing and using the resources of the group, around evaluating the work, around sharing the leadership and being an effective communicator. It was also important that it be someone who the school community could trust to lead the process. Most of the liaison people grew into the role and flourished in it as illustrated in the following reflection.

*I have been supported well in my role as liaison person by my colleagues and the Principal. The NCCA team have been great too. I know they are just a phone call away if I need help. I find the role challenging enough because work is not already defined, it is developmental, it's difficult sometimes to lead a team when we're not sure what the end result is going to be. Having said that, I find it a valuable experience. I would be the most junior member of staff on the team which only mattered to me, the rest of the team didn't mind.*

When new initiatives are started in schools they have to initially fit in with existing school culture and organisation. Where there is no culture of working lunches, of consulting with students, of junior members of staff taking on leadership roles, then the pace of change can be slow. Each of the schools had its own distinct culture which was a combination of history, current leadership, past leadership, size, and location and so on. This culture involved routines and rituals, the 'way we do things' resulting in long held formal and informal systems, rules, traditions and customs. It required strong leadership on the part of the liaison person and the team members to confront and question some of these traditions like *why have higher level maths always six classes. Why can't LCA students take part in Seachtain na Gaeilge? Why can we not reconsider the half day on Wednesday, very few of our students play sport now?* The make up of the core team was also very important in leading the whole staff in the process. All staff was consulted throughout the process. Where they identified with teacher 'leaders' in the core team they were more open to the process. They did not see it as an NCCA initiative, rather as a school initiative. Some schools ran their own teacher consultation meetings while others asked NCCA to come and co-facilitate them with the team.

NCCA also provided leadership and support for the liaison people and their teams. They helped to agree agendas for meetings, supported some team meetings, and provided stimulus materials and so on. The group seminars also provided a forum for liaison people to meet and discuss their successes and challenges. The group brought a lot of expertise to the discussions—there were three with guidance backgrounds, three Assistant Principals and all had experiences from different previous leadership roles.

Distributed leadership, where the leadership in a given aspect of change comes from multiple sources and where change comes about through the relational activity that follows, has particular potential for schools. There are many definitions of distributed

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leadership and the concept has a variety of meanings<sup>6</sup>. Spillane's description of distributed leadership as a system of practice that takes place in the interactions of leaders, followers and their situation is most apt when discussing this initiative. Aspects of the situation can either enable or constrain practice, while practice can transform the situation. He goes on to say that

*..... leadership involves mortals as well as heroes. It involves the many not just the few. It is about leadership practice, not simple roles and positions. And leadership practice is about interactions, not just the actions of heroes (Spillane, 2006, p4).*

Overall this initiative has provided insights into the importance of leadership to the change process, into what different aspects and kinds of leadership offer to initiatives like this, into how leadership both reflects and transacts with the history and culture of the school. Across the schools, there were examples of traditional forms of leadership, of 'heroic' forms of leadership, of quite democratic approaches to leadership and on the contribution that distributed leadership can make to progressing initiatives of this kind.

### **3.2.4 Strategies for change must be agile**

While the eight schools participating in the initiative had DEIS status, they were different in terms of staff, leadership patterns, available resources and size. They provided significant evidence that a variety of strategies is needed in response to change initiatives that reflect school organisation, school culture and resistance to change. The need for agility in planning was tested in one of the schools where they had based a lot of their planning and development around one staff member and then this individual left the school. Currently, most of the schools are experiencing cutbacks and need to revisit their plans around mentoring. Having a contingency plan is very important in these schools. Smaller schools are particularly challenged in this respect.

The original thinking was that schools would devise FLPs and then implement them. Very early on, it became apparent that this was not going to happen all at once. The complexity of changing teaching and learning and personalising learning is not possible if done all at once. It is incremental, more about evolving and supporting change than about 'implementing' notional change. And most importantly, schools now see that

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<sup>6</sup> For a review of literature in distributed leadership, see the NCSL report on Distributed Leadership, 2003 available to download from <http://forms.ncsl.org.uk/mediastore/image2/bennett-distributed-leadership-full.pdf>

providing curriculum flexibility is only one part of the puzzle. Students also need to be supported in managing their learning and in making choices around learning. It takes time to get teachers to a point where they can focus on learning through a variety of lenses: inclusion, diversity, flexibility and quality of experience. Schools also showed agility in their exploration of changes possible within current policy and provision and began exploring ways of making change happen, for example, expanding curriculum choice, and providing student mentoring and so on. In all schools students, teachers and parents were consulted on the development of the FLP. In some schools, the wider community was included in the consultations. One school in Cork has initiated talks with Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) around the development of ePortfolios. This in turn has led to CIT initiating contact with University College Cork (UCC) to get involved. A learning community around ePortfolios is now developing and links and partnerships being formed through the FLP work. Rather than becoming a FETAC provider, some schools have looked at forming partnerships with neighbouring schools around provision of FETAC awards.

In reflecting on the principles of change involving time, leadership, investment and agility and on schools as knowledge and research sites, it is clear that when resources are made available and when autonomy around decision-making is given to schools real innovation around change is possible. In the first phase of this initiative much of the energy went into looking at how the schools were organised, what they offer and how they do things rather than on teaching and learning and teachers as professionals engaged in curriculum development. This became more evident when the teams zoned in on key skills and the link to personalisation in learning. This refocusing on teaching, learning and the student experience was also supported by external factors such as the increasing influence of the National Framework of Qualifications with its emphasis on diverse qualifications, outcomes-based curricula, skills and competencies and recognition of all learning. This has enabled schools involved to engage in thinking more directly on flexibility, personalisation, certification and credit. The need for clear progression routes are mentioned in all the FLPs.



### 3.3 Outcomes from the process

This initiative illustrates that there is a hunger for change amongst students and teachers and a desire to move towards more flexible and personalised learning. While the vision of Flexible Learning Profiles involves layers of work and layers of change, already that change has begun. Each school has already embarked on delivering some aspects of FLPs. During the coming year it will be important to document this process so that schools can learn from each other's journey. Some of the outcomes from the process to date are discussed below.

#### **3.3.1 Diversity and flexibility**

All the schools involved in this initiative agreed that the present organisation of senior cycle, where learners are expected to fit into the structures and practices of schools is not conducive to catering for diversity and flexibility. They have spent the last three years exploring how the structures and practices of schools can be adapted to better suit individual learning interests and needs. Schools strive to improve flexibility in learning even within the present confines of structures and practices. However, these schools feel that they can do better for their students. This was especially evident after their consultations with students, teachers and others in the process of developing the FLPs.

There is concern around the degree of choice for students. Some teams feel that given a wide choice some learners may be less likely to take up options which are challenging in the short term but may offer enhanced opportunities in the longer term. They stress the importance of communication around choices and educational guidance and the need to offer flexibility for learners to opt into courses and build up a portfolio of learning over time.

#### **3.3.2. The student voice**

Teachers and students benefited from the student consultations. Teachers found the experience very valuable as a way of gaining insight into students' experiences of senior cycle, and students liked being asked their opinion. Whatever feel-good factor consultation generates, it would not be of much value for the schools if it did not offer practical ideas on how to improve the experience of the students. Liaison people attended training on conducting focus groups and then they trained their teams in the

skills of consultation. All teams agreed that the consultations were important in informing their thinking around the development of FLPs.

*The student voice will be an integral part of the FLP. We believe that involving students in choices about what they learn and how they learn and personalising their learning will enable them become more involved, more committed and more responsible in their own education as well as enabling them to experience success.*

Schools reported that the benefits to the students involved in this initiative were both direct and indirect. Being consulted tended to have a positive impact on the students self-esteem, their attitude to school and learning, their sense of being part of a community and their ability to reflect and talk about learning. There were also indirect benefits in the way the teachers built relationships with the students and changed their perceptions of them as individuals and learners. This is evidenced in how almost all the schools see some form of student mentoring as crucial to the success of FLPs in their schools and the need for on-going consultation.

*When we consulted the students about senior cycle content they felt that much of what they were being taught was irrelevant and boring and did not connect with their everyday life experiences. Therefore to engage students more fully in their learning significant explanation of curriculum content, its relevance and the payoffs in terms of career and personal development (acquiring transferrable skills, greater understanding of the world etc.) will be undertaken in all areas of learning. The integration of learning and the cross curricular nature of knowledge will be emphasised throughout the FLPs to enhance the students motivation. Consulting the students re course content will take account of their expressed needs but will also take into account the requirements of outside agencies (matriculation requirements etc.) for education progression.*

Schools became aware of the value of profiling students and the need for a system of student mentoring to support students in staying on track with their learning.

*We believe that students would need to receive constant feedback and to be given regular opportunities to review their progress. Mentoring and tutorial classes would therefore need to be built into the whole process.*

Schools seemed to welcome the umbrella of FLP work to allow them focus on the big picture and pull together different things happening in their school. In generating the student profiles, they spoke of the chance to get an insight into what different people

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did in the school for the student like the Guidance Counsellor, Home School Liaison person, learning support teachers and so on.

This inclusion of the student voice in curriculum development should play a central role in planning for all schools.

### **3.3.3. Centrality of teaching and learning**

In looking at ways to cater for the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student, schools explored what kind of teaching could help the students learn and how this climate of teaching and learning could be developed. This entailed teachers coming to a different understanding of the educational process to move from one size fits all to a more personalised, individual emphasis in their planning for teaching and learning. Recent research into student well-being has highlighted the possibilities for schooling to make a positive impact on the well-being of young people.

*It is clear that a sense of belonging and good relationships within the school community foster feelings of well-being. Thus, educators, school leaders and policy makers need to ensure that the ways in which formal and informal curricula of schools are implemented enable the development of good relationships (O'Brien, p181, 2008)*

Findings from the key skills initiative also support the need for students to be actively engaged in their learning and the potential for enhanced learning when teachers used cooperative learning activities. Teachers reported that when key skills were the focus of planning for teaching that the class was more learner-centred and less content-centred. Key skills were key to unlocking new ways of thinking and new ways of doing. Teachers reported that they began to use more group work, pair-work, class discussion, peer-teaching and peer-assessment. The students had to take more responsibility for their learning. Attendance improved and students reported that they enjoyed learning. Teaching and learning are central to FLPs and changing teaching and learning is intrinsically linked to the embedding of key skills. Next year three of the schools will be implementing key skills across the curriculum. The linking of key skills and FLPs seems to have to do with the creation of a culture of learning within some of the schools as illustrated in the following reflection.

*With the introduction of key skills to the school the teaching approach has already begun to change. Students are already beginning to engage with the*

*key skills method and have expressed this as a preferred way of learning. We envisage that all members of staff will be au fait with the key skills and will incorporate them into their teaching. Our involvement in the key skills project has shown that students enjoy learning in an environment where they can actively engage with the subject. We believe that this approach should influence learning inside and outside of the classroom.*

All school saw changes to teaching and learning as underpinning principles and defining features of their FLPs.

*Relationships with teachers would be different in that the process would be more collaborative than before. The teacher now becomes more a facilitator of the students learning rather than the traditional conveyor of the curriculum. Both student and teacher would be working towards agreed negotiated learning outcomes.*

*Other significant changes within the classroom would be a greater emphasis on active learning methodologies using multimedia technologies as well as promoting improved oral communication and the use of group work processes. FLPs will also foster and encourage an enquiry orientated approach to learning, making the learner's experience of education more rewarding and fulfilling.*

*A collaborative approach between teacher and pupil is the key dynamic in FLP. It follows from this that the traditional 'chalk and talk' and teachers supplying students with notes for rote learning and then regurgitating them in tests and exams is now a redundant methodology. Using key skills as the driver of the curriculum will fundamentally change relationships between teachers and students in the classroom requiring a different approach from both. Teachers will become facilitators of learning rather than the expert dispensing knowledge to students from the top down. It will require teachers to adopt to a changed classroom environment where students will have some input into how and what their learning will be.*

*ICT will be used as a tool (not a replacement for teaching) to help improve outcomes for students, engage 'hard to reach' learners, with special needs support, to build an open and accessible system with more information and on-line services for parents and carers, adult learners and employees which will allow for greater cross organisation and collaboration to improve personalised support.*

This common thread of emphasis on the teaching and learning in FLPs is illuminating in the centrality placed on learners in the learning process, on them taking an active role in their own learning, and on learners being given opportunities to learn in groups, to develop skills, to have opportunities to develop creativity, and to be given more scope to develop personal responsibility for learning. The vision of senior cycle is one where students are part of a community of learners, where participation in learning as a social experience would be part of every student's experience. Each student would

develop and understand their own distinctive set of skills and abilities and build on these throughout their learning experience. Many of the aspects of FLPs being implemented by the schools this year focus on achieving the aim of giving learners scope to shape their own learning experiences, to contribute to the learning experiences of others and to improve success in learning. The enthusiasm with which schools and teachers have embraced key skills provides evidence of the scope for change in senior cycle leading to more engaged learning.

#### **3.3.4. Leading and supporting change**

In this initiative, NCCA has posed some key questions to schools around diversity and flexibility and schools have pointed to the complexity of answering those questions and to the need for multiple, more customised solutions. NCCA has facilitated the process and offered support and encouragement to the schools as they work through the development of the FLPs and implementation plans. Part of this support and encouragement involves the formation of networks in the schools in the first instance and networks between the schools in the second instance. In some cases, this has progressed to involving other agencies, such as the partnership forming with Cork Institute of Technology. In addition to facilitating this development of networks, NCCA provided very context specific professional development for the liaison people and their teams, such as facilitating meetings, consulting with students, consulting with other significant adults, role of ICT in learning, the development of individual education plans, support for learning, development of mentoring guidelines and so on.

The FLP initiative, thus far, has confirmed the view expressed in *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools* that schools are the most important site of the process of educational change and that changes to teaching and learning are central to that change. The initiative has also provided ample evidence of how disposed schools are towards being innovative in their ideas and their practice, once they are reasonably resourced and supported in this context. This need for external support also represents an important finding of the initiative so far. The schools involved proved more than capable of organising themselves internally to answer the questions that were being posed by the initiative, and more than inclined to link and network with other schools to share experiences. But they also expressed the view that schools needed the support of external agencies to assist their work and to set the broad policy parameters within

which their ideas would be developed. In this sense, the view of educational change as having to do with a combination of bottom-up and top-down elements was evident.

This developmental work with schools on Flexible Learning Profiles has provided many important insights into how change happens. Students, teachers, schools leaders, school communities and other partners have been central to the process. The possibilities around ensuring a fit between learners' strengths and challenges, their needs and lives and the curriculum choices available to them has been explored in different contexts. The role of information technology, support for learning, qualifications, key skills, school organisation, work-based learning, assessment and so on has been examined and will be further illuminated in the coming year in the case study schools. Learning from this initiative will inform thinking on junior cycle in the schools and the wider policy arena. Findings from each of the case study schools will be reported on in the coming year.

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## Appendix 1

### Participants

The schools involved in the initiative are listed below. All the schools had DEIS status (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) at the outset of the initiative and were selected to reflect a spread of school type, size, urban/rural and gender.

Athy Community College, Kildare

Deansrath Community College, Clondalkin

Deerpark CBS, Cork

Listowel Community College, Kerry

Loreto College, Crumlin

Nagle Community College, Cork

North Presentation Secondary School<sup>7</sup>, Cork

St. Pauls Secondary School<sup>8</sup>, Greenhills

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<sup>7</sup> Left the initiative in June 2008

<sup>8</sup> Left the initiative in May 2007

## Appendix 2

### Case study 2: Student profiles

**Background:** Students completing junior cycle are offered a choice of three courses in Senior Cycle:

- Choice 1      transfer to **Transition year**, followed by a two year Leaving Certificate. The school policy (with some exceptions) is to direct the more able students to follow this option.
- Choice 2      transfer directly to a two year **Leaving Certificate** (year 5 & 6). This option is considered by only a small number of students with varying degrees of success.
- Choice 3      transfer to **Leaving Certificate Applied** (LCA Y1 & LCA Y2). The numbers applying for LCA are on par with those applying for TY.

The decision on the most appropriate course is made by reference to the parent /student's requested choice, the student's progress to Junior Certificate and the staff recommendations. In the majority of cases these decisions concur but difficulties do arise and compromises are sometimes necessary. Students' lack of motivation rather than lack of ability too often informs their senior school choice.

**Methodology:** The following report records a profile of four students from year 3 (Junior Certificate year 2009). The four students were selected by the FPL team as representative of the year group, in that a wide range of abilities and experiences are recorded. The profiles determined to ascertain the students opinions and experience of school to date, as well as identifying their personal strengths and aspirations for the future. The profile was developed by interview (two interviews per student) and by reference to the student records. Results for three common subject were selected for the students to facilitate comparisons. The remaining three subject relate to 'preferred' subjects identified by the student. In the second interview students were asked to consider the FPL time table structure developed by the FPL team which offered a wide range of possible Leaving Certificate modules. All year 3 students are provided with information regarding the senior school course choices at this time of year.

Permission for participation in the process was secured by written consent from the parent/guardian. Anonymity was promised in respect of identifying the student by name.

The four students are identified by letter A, B, C & D. These labels coincide with the AH3 summary grades achieved by these students in their year 1 assessments.

## Student interviews

### Student A

AH3	06/07	Verbal	Numerical	Perceptual	Total	Chr. Age	Reading Age
		A	A	B	A	11.7	12.6

### SCHOOL LIFE

#### Why did you come to this school?

I came from Christ Rí (*Primary school - not a main feeder school*). My brother was already here, and we did not like the set up in the other school. My brother did better in his Junior Cert. than those who were in his class in primary school.

#### What do you like about the school?

I'm happy here. It is grand. I get stuff done here. It is a small school and everybody knows each other. Teachers interact well with students. Teachers are helpful.

#### What do you not like about the school?

I'm not too happy with two of my teachers. They are not helpful.  
We can't wear our own jackets.

### SUBJECTS

#### What subjects do you like? Why?

Maths, Woodwork, Business and Geography. I like being able to solve problems in maths and business. I feel better after doing this. I like the projects in woodwork, and I learn about my world in geography.

#### What subjects do you dislike? Why?

I don't like languages, i.e. Irish, English, French and History.  
Religion and Science are tough subjects.

### SOCIAL

#### What are your hobbies?

I'm in an Athletics Club. I train three times a week. I spend about 2-3 hours per week training.

#### How well do you relate to others?

I work in the school shop. I was given the job because of my brother. He worked there before me. It is a good way of getting to know people. I like people who are hardworking, but not people who are too strict or rigid.

**Who influences you the most?**

My dad and brother. I look up to my older brother.

**FUTURE CAREER / SUBJECT OPTIONS**

I'd like to do Business. My heart would be in Finance. I'm also interested in being a Geography and History teacher. Science is interesting but hard. I might take only Biology to Leaving Certificate. Other students tell me History is too tough to do. I would like to take Accounting as one of my subjects to Leaving Certificate.

The following table illustrates the academic performance of student **A** at Christmas and Summer assessments from year 1 through to year 3 across a selected range of subjects (Subject Level identified as H:Higher, O:Ordinary or F:Foundation)

Exam	Eng.	L	Ir.	L	Math	L	Wood	L	Bus	L	Geo	L
Xmas Y1	45	-	60	-	55	H	89	-	92	-	92	-
May Y1	70	H	85	O	72	H	90	-	-	-	58	-
Xmas Y2	65	H	63	O	85	H	67	-	51	-	58	-
May Y2	60	H	55	O	82	H	65	H	83	H	57	H
Xmas Y3	62	H	71	O	72	H	65	H	63	H	72	H
Avg.	60.4		66.8		73.2		75.2		72.3		67.4	

(Eng.: English, Ir.; Irish, Math: Mathematics, Wood: Materials Technology Wood, Bus.: Business, Geo: Geography)

**ICT Skills**

Student A has declared a knowledge of computers and spends approx. 2 hours/night on his home PC. He has competence in spreadsheets, email, bebo, etc.

**STUDENT A & FLP**

In line with the information recorded for this student, he has selected a largely academic Leaving Certificate but has identified a selected number of modules in other programmes.

Student Selection:

Traditional Leaving Certificate	Other Modules
English	Irish (LCA)
French	Biology (TY module)
Maths	Career Guidance
Business	Construction (LCA)
Accounting	Car Maintenance (**)
Economics	Computers (ECDL)
RE	
PE	

**COMMENT**

Student A has a very good academic record, is co-operative and hard-working. He has identified his strengths and has selected Leaving Certificate subjects in line with his interest in Business / Maths.

**Can the school provide the programmes required by this student?**

The school does not offer Economics as a Leaving Certificate subject but an FETAC award in a Business related area might meet this students requirements. The mixture of LC & LCA courses could be provided. This student would be expected to go to Transition year before his Leaving Certificate and could pursue a number of TY modules here .

(\*\*) Car maintenance is a frequently cited by students as a desirable course. The concept is almost certainly considered by 'boys' as an essential skill but it not clear if they would wish to pursue the course to certification. Facilities and instructors would have to be resources from outside the school for this course.

**Student B**

AH3	06/07	Verbal	Numerical	Perceptual	Total	Chr. Age	Reading Age
		C	A	B	<b>B</b>	12.1	12.3

**SCHOOL LIFE****Why did you come to this school?**

I came from a Gaelscoil (*Primary school*). I choose this school because of friends going here, and also the school is near my home.

**What do you like about the school?**

I like it here because of sport and science.

**What do you not like about the school?**

I don't like wearing the uniform. There is no Soccer Team in the school (*This comment not factually correct*). Too much homework. I'd like to do the written homework in school, and leave the study to do at home. If I could do the written home work in school.

**SUBJECTS****What subjects do you like? Why?**

I like Maths, Science and PE. I like solving problems in Maths. I like the Practical Work in Science. I'm doing 11 subjects at Higher Level. I do 4 hours of study per day for 6 days a week. I take Saturday off.

**What subjects do you dislike? Why?**

Geography and Irish. Geography is boring. I could do with more help in the subject.

**SOCIAL****What are your hobbies?**

I play Soccer (Right Back) seven days a week. I'm with Togher Soccer Club. I train before breakfast nearly every day. I also have played Hurling, Gaelic Football and Table Tennis.

**How well do you relate to others?**

I get on well with others.

**Who influences you the most?**

My dad. Dad helps me with my homework. Roy Keane.

## FUTURE CAREER / SUBJECT OPTIONS

I'd like to do Pharmacy. I'm not interested in Medicine. Don't like the blood and guts. I'd like mixing chemicals. I'd be interested in taking all three Sciences to Leaving Certificate.

The following table illustrates the academic performance of student **B** at Christmas and Summer assessments from year 1 through to year 3 across a selected range of subjects (Subject Level identified as H:Higher, O:Ordinary or F:Foundation)

Exam	Eng.	L	Ir.	L	Math	L	Wood	L	Sc	L	Bus	L
Xmas Y1	67	-	75	-	45	H	75	-	90	-		-
May Y1	76	H	95	-	76	H	75	-	91	-	77	-
Xmas Y2	85	H	97	H	64	H	50	-	88	-	77	-
May Y2	82	H	85	H	88	H	60	H	80	H	85	H
Xmas Y3	70	H	75	H	100	H	80	H	77	H	75	H
Avg.	76		85.4		74.6		68		85.2		78.5	

(Eng.: English, Ir.,; Irish, Math: Mathematics, Wood: Materials Technology Wood, Bus.: Business, Sc: Science)

## ICT Skills

Student B has declared little knowledge of computers.

## STUDENT B & FLP

In line with the information recorded for this student, he has selected a largely academic Leaving Certificate but has identified a selected number of modules in other programmes.



## Student Selection:

Traditional Leaving Certificate	Other Modules
English	Computers (ECDL)
Irish	Career Guidance
French	First Aid (TY module)
Mathematics	Car Maintenance (**)
Biology	
Chemistry	
Physics	
PE	

**COMMENT**

Student B is a quiet and reserved person and shows a consistently good academic record. This student's choice of subjects supports his intention to follow a career in science. It is expected that this student would go to Transition year before his Leaving Certificate.

**Can the school provide the programmes required by this student?**

This student would be expected to follow a traditional Leaving Certificate course. The choices outlined above suggest the student wishes to expand his learning experience and undertake additional modules which can be facilitated in FLP programme. The expressed desire to 'complete' homework in school was previously considered by the FPL team and is reflected in the FPL timetable as a core component.

(\*\*) See Student A

**Student C**

AH3	06/07	Verbal	Numerical	Perceptual	Total	Chr. Age	Reading Age
		C	C	C	<b>C</b>	12.7	11.7

**SCHOOL LIFE****Why did you come to this school?**

Heard about it from a friend. Heard it was a good school with soccer.

**What do you like about the school?**

The sport and the teachers are friendly and not cross.

**What do you not like about the school?**

The school rules on jewellery. We should be allowed to wear large ear rings and rings on our fingers. I don't agree with wearing studs. I don't like the subject Maths.

**SUBJECTS****What subjects do you like? Why?**

History, Geography, English and PE. I hope to do Higher Level Geography and History. I like them because they are easy to understand.

**What subjects do you dislike? Why?**

Maths, French and Technical Graphics. I don't like them because they are too complicated. I can't understand them.

**SOCIAL****What are your hobbies?**

Fishing, Soccer, Hurling and Gaelic Football. Some weekends I sit on a wall and talk. I'm in a Soccer and Fishing Club.

**How well do you relate to others?**

I relate well to others. I get on well with most people.

**Who influences you the most?**

The Principal, he has good things to say about me. He sees the good in me.

### FUTURE CAREER / SUBJECT OPTIONS

I'd like to be a soccer player. I'm hoping to go back over to Aston Villa over the summer. I'd like to do LCA. But my mam is not too happy with the school. I might have to do LCA in another school. If the soccer doesn't work out, I'd like to be a Car Mechanic.

The following table illustrates the academic performance of student **C** at Christmas and Summer assessments from year 1 through to year 3 across a selected range of subjects (Subject Level identified as H:Higher, O:Ordinary or F:Foundation)

Exam	Eng.	L	Ir.	L	Math	L	His	L	Sc	L	Geo	L
Xmas Y1	62	-	35	-	53	-	65	-	47	-	56	-
May Y1	57	-	66	-	41	O	69	-	56	-	32	-
Xmas Y2	76	O	56	-	31	O	45	-	26	-	67	-
May Y2	70	O	46	O/F	37	O	49	O	46	O	61	O
Xmas Y3	50	O		O/F	38	O	73	O	60	O	60	O
Avg.	63		51		40		60		47		55	

(Eng.: English, Ir.: Irish, Math: Mathematics, Wood: Materials Technology Wood, Geo.: Geography, Sc: Science)

### ICT Skills

Student C has declared little knowledge of computers.

### STUDENT C & FLP

Student C found a difficulty with a flexible timetable which might require him to take modules out of 'normal' school hours. Any proposal which 'cut into' this students' free time had little support.

## Student Selection:

Traditional Leaving Certificate	Other Modules
Maths	Computers LCA
Biology	Career Guidance
Construction Studies	Cookery (**)
PE	Car Maintenance (**)
	English (LCA)
	Irish (LCA)
	Art (LCA)
	Business (FETEC?)
	First Aid (**) (TY module)
	Science (Chem./Phy.)

**COMMENT**

Student C was frequently cited for being inattentive and disruptive in class. Student has been subject to the rigors of the discipline system and has shown some improvement. Sport is an important focus for the student but he does not apply the same enthusiasm/discipline to mainstream subjects.

**Can the school provide the programmes required by this student?**

The choices indicated above suggest that the student's wish list can be accommodated in part by a mix of LC and LCA courses. However, the student has expressed an interest in a number of subjects (\*\*) which will require external facilitation in personnel and resources. The FPL team have discussed possible options to deliver these modules.

## Student D

AH3	06/07	Verbal	Numerical	Perceptual	Total	Chr. Age	Reading Age
		D	C	D	<b>D</b>	11.11	9.9

### SCHOOL LIFE

#### Why did you come to this school?

I came from Morning Star (*Primary school – traditional feeder school*). All my friends were coming here.

#### What do you like about the school?

I learn things.

#### What do you not like about the school?

I don't like the school rules. There is no point to detention. I don't like the stairs. They are too tiring. We should have a lift. I don't like homework. We don't get it anyway. If we do, we should do it in school.

### SUBJECTS

#### What subjects do you like? Why?

History, Science, Woodwork and PE. I like the projects in woodwork. I'm good at it. I like the practical work and experiments in science. I like history because we are looking at the past.

#### What subjects do you dislike? Why?

English – You get piles of work. I don't like homework.

French – I don't understand it.

I don't like languages - they are too hard.

### SOCIAL

#### What are your hobbies?

Fishing, Soccer and playing Hurling. I'm good at sport. I'm in Kilreen Soccer Club. I like fishing. We drive over to Castletownbere and stay overnight.

#### How well do you relate to others?

I get on well with others. I'm good socially when I go away fishing. I am a patient person (to a question arising from the need to be patient when fishing).

**Who influences you the most?**

My mum and dad. They always give me what I want.

In school, I find Mr. X very helpful. I admire Student Y (classmate) as well.

**FUTURE CAREER / SUBJECT OPTIONS**

I'd like to do engineering, i.e. become a mechanic. I would be interested in doing a subject like that in the Leaving Cert.

The following table illustrates the academic performance of student **D** at Christmas and Summer assessments from year 1 through to year 3 across a selected range of subjects (Subject **L**evel identified as H:Higher, O:Ordinary or F:Foundation)

Exam	Eng.	L	Ir.	L	Math	L	Wood	L	Sc	L	His	L
Xmas Y1	51	-	-	-	60	-	50	-	3	-		-
May Y1	60	-	-	-	95	-	45	-	42	-	28	-
Xmas Y2	40	-	-	-	47	F	32	-	32	-	49	-
May Y2	50	O/F	-	-	56	F	55	O	76	O	35	O
Xmas Y3	40	O/F	-	-	76	F	15	O	63	O	73	O
Avg.	48.2		*		66.8		39.4		43.2		46.3	

- Exemption granted in Irish.

(Eng.: English, Ir.; Irish, Math: Mathematics, Wood: Materials Technology Wood, His.: History, Sc: Science)

**ICT Skills**

Student D spends 1 hour/night on bebo.

**STUDENT D & FLP**

Student D prefers a set timetable – little enthusiasm for modules provided outside of ‘normal’ school hours. This student also receives 2.5 hours resource teaching and avails of DEIS resources and support.

Student Selection:

Traditional Leaving Certificate	Other Modules
	English (LCA)
	Maths (LCA)
	ICT (LCA)
	Art (LCA)
	Practical Science (LCA elective)
	Graphics & Construction (LCA)
	PE (LCA)
	Car maintenance (**)
	Work Exp. (Building Trade) (LCA)

## COMMENT

Student D has a poor record of behaviour, participation and engagement from year 1. His organisational and timekeeping abilities are poor. The LCA programme offers this student the best possible Leaving Certificate option.

### Can the school provide the programmes required by this student?

With the single exception of the car maintenance programme the current LCA programme will meet the stated requirements. However the difficulties experienced by this student from year 1 – year 3 will only be addressed with a programme which offers greater engagement for the student including focused Personal Development programme. Student support interventions will be required to assist this student staying with the LCA programme.

## Appendix 3

### Cass study 4: student profiles

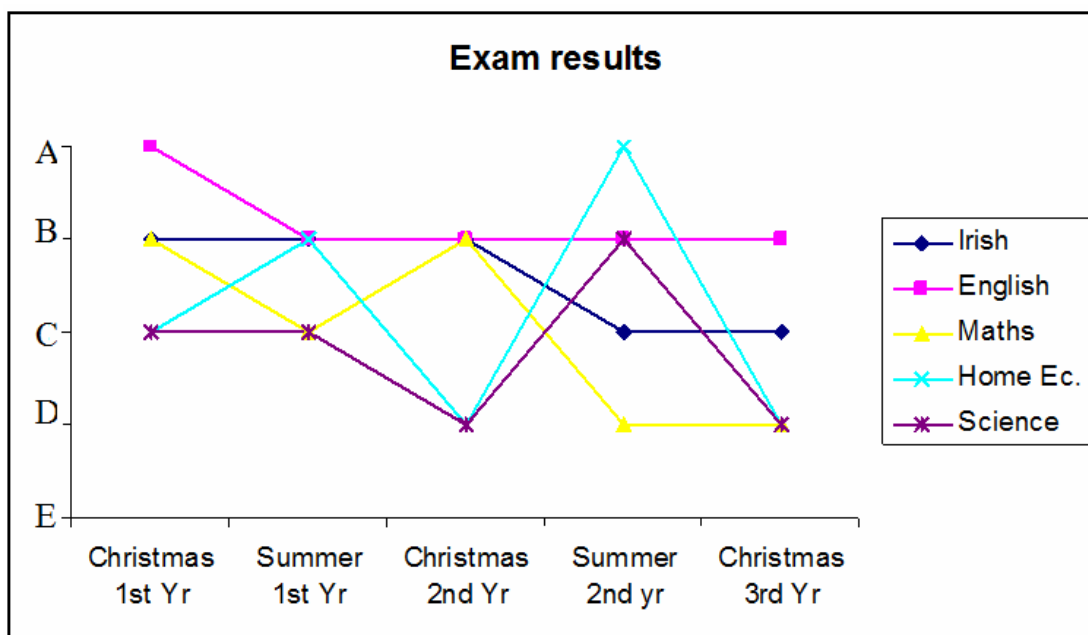
#### **Case Study A: Mary**

Mary is 15 years old; she is currently in third year in the Junior Certificate School Programme. Mary is a very quiet, shy person; she is also very co-operative, polite and mannerly. Mary lives with her mother and her mother's partner. Mary's mother is unwell and Mary would help out a lot in the home. Mary is the second eldest child of six children. Mary's eldest sister is currently in 5<sup>th</sup> yr LCA; the next sibling is in first year. The other siblings are in primary school.

Mary's attendance at school needs to improve; she had exceeded the departmental regulations of 20 days absent in first year and second year. So far this year she has missed 14 days. When Mary does attend school, she is very punctual. She has a small circle of friends, which includes her older sister. She works well in class, and has received a positive report from her tutor. Mary had a psychological assessment when she was in first year, it identified that she has a mild general learning disability; the recommendations for this were that she would be better placed in JCSP. The JCSP is a small class group, 13 students. The class participates in team teaching to support maths and Mary has one class of withdrawal per week. Mary will sit most of her exams in the Junior Certificate at foundation or ordinary level. It is expected that Mary will also do the LCA programme.



In-house assessments:



### As a learner?

Mary is a very well behaved student who always works to the best of her ability. She is always willing to attempt all class work, does her homework diligently and is very polite and well mannered. She wants to do well in school and in her exams. Mary is almost too quiet in class and generally will not ask questions or participate very willingly in class discussions.

### As a person?

She is very quiet and shy. Mary is very reliable and responsible; will always complete any tasks to the best of her ability. She won't speak a lot unless in a small group and "I could never imagine that she would disagree or argue with a teacher even over a difference of opinion" (comment from tutor). She is a very kind and sensitive girl who is very good to other students.

### Interests/activities

Mary loves clothes, fashion and popular music. She also loves going to the cinema with friends.

### **Any other information?**

Mary's mother is unwell with a long term illness. When her mother is going through treatment, Mary is very upset and emotional. Her mother says that she is a wonderful help at home.

### **Responses from interview:**

Mary's favourite subject is English, she dislikes maths and history. She enjoys playing football. Her favourite thing about school is Games on Monday and that all the teachers are nice. Her least favourite thing is homework.

Mary doesn't see any major difference about Senior Cycle, the changes she would like to make are: *"go outside the school and learn more about different things and enter competitions"*

Mary would like to study Childcare when she leaves school as she likes minding children, she will do a PLC course to enable this.

Mary identifies one of her strengths as being *good in class* and a weakness as being *shy most of the time*.

### **Curriculum Planning Grid**

Mary identified the following subjects as areas she would most like to study:

LCA: Maths for Living, LCA: Communications (English), LCA: Art Module, LCA: Science, Work Based Learning: Work experience in a lab, FETAC: Start your own Business, FETAC: Childcare,

Other areas of interest included:

LCA: Engineering, FETAC: IT Skills, FETAC: Hairdressing Theory and Practice, Transition Units: Setting up a Green School, FETAC: Personal effectiveness in the workplace, LCA: Irish, FETAC: English as a second language, other: Gaeltacht during summer.

### **Timetable for Fifth Yr:**

Most of Mary's subject requirements could be facilitated within the current Leaving Certificate Applied timetable

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Class 1	Childcare	English	Childcare	Art	Maths
Class 2	Childcare	IT	Childcare	Art	English
Class 3	Irish	IT	Childcare	Maths	Social Ed
Break					
Class 4	Social Ed	Work Prep See note (i)	Study	Study	IT
Class 5	Religion		English	Maths	IT
Class 6	English		Social Ed	Social Ed	Irish
Lunch					
Class 7	Maths	Work Exp See note (ii)	Religion	Note (iii)	
Class 8	Art		Irish		
Class 9	Art		English		

- (i) Mary has identified three career paths that she would like to follow: childcare, working in a lab and hairdressing. It is suggested that she would spend four weeks sampling each area and then at Christmas she will identify which are she would prefer to focus. During this time, Mary will study one of the following: *LCA Science*, *FETAC: Start your own Business*, *FETAC: Hairdressing Theory and Practice*.
- (ii) Work experience would be chosen to facilitate the three areas that Mary has indicated she would like to find out more about.
- (iii) This block on the timetable is currently used to facilitate guest speakers and out of school visits as organised by the LCA Co-ordinator.
- Mary has two study periods on her timetable, this time could be used to meet with her FLP mentor or on working on IT.
  - Mary has expressed an interest in working on *Setting up a Green School*; this could be facilitated at lunchtime if there were a group of interested students.
  - Childcare isn't currently available, but the course has been delivered in the past.

## Case Study B: Tom

Tom is 15 years old; he is currently in third year in the Junior Certificate Programme. Tom is an extremely well mannered young man; he is a very quiet person. Tom is from Nigeria originally, he moved here with his family in the summer of 2009. He has adjusted to school life well but is slow to make friends with other members of his class; this is not necessarily a reflection on Tom.

Tom's parents are divorced and he lives with his father. Tom has one younger brother who is in second year; he also has a half sister who lives in Holland with their mother.

Tom joined the school in third year, he scored 12 on his reading ability test, but this may have been influenced by language factors. Tom receives extra help with English on a daily basis; this is to correct grammatical errors. Tom has an excellent attendance and is very punctual. Tom is working very well in class and obtained excellent results in his Christmas Tests, Tom will take higher level in all his subjects for his Junior Cert. Tom will do the traditional LC next year.

Christmas Test results:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Grade</b>
English	Higher	C
Maths	Higher	B
Mat. Tech. Wood	Higher	B
Mat. Tech. Metal	Higher	D
Business	Higher	B
History	Higher	B
Science	Higher	A
Religion	Higher	B
CSPE	Higher	C

### As a learner?

Tom is very interested in his work; he has a very mature attitude to schoolwork. He is very keen to learn and anxious to succeed. Homework is always attempted. Tom is very respectful towards teachers. Tom works very well on his own; he participates well in class and is working well towards his Junior Cert exams.

**As a person?**

Tom has a good sense of personal responsibility. He relates well with teachers but it can be hard to understand his pronunciation at times. Tom is very polite. He does not interact with other students in class but works very well with the student sitting beside him, very helpful to other students. Tom has developed a friendship with another student in his class who is also new to the country. Tom's writing can be difficult to read at times.

**Interests/activities**

Tom isn't interested in sports but is very keen to learn especially in the areas of science and technology.

**Any other information**

Tom is ambitious and is working towards his exam. He is very interested in the material presented to him in class; he is open to receive all information, not just narrow course work. Tom's previous lifestyle in Nigeria was very different, his school was very basic and they didn't have furniture. This may explain his desire to learn.

**Responses from Interview**

Tom likes all the subjects that he is currently studying. He loves reading and scientific text book in which he can learn from. His favourite thing about school is *that school makes me think about my life*, also to know what he is supposed to be aiming for and because it is not boring like *sitting down at home doing nothing*. Tom's least favourite thing about school is sometimes he feels sleepy and cannot concentrate.

When asked what does he see different about senior cycle, Tom responded: *5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year is the point where you will start knowing where you belong to, i.e. in your career in the future*. The changes he would make are: *students will be made work, studying rather than playing because it is an important stage in their life*.

When Tom finishes school, he would like to study electronic/electrical computing engineering because he loves this area and *it will make him earn a huge salary*. He plans on going to third level to achieve this.

Tom identifies his strength as studying numbers and scientific material while his weakness is English.

### Curriculum Planning Grid

Tom identified the following subjects as areas he would most like to study:

Leaving Certificate Subject: Maths, English, Construction, History, Biology, Engineering, Chemistry, Physics

Other areas of interest were:

LC Geography, FETAC: Computer Applications, Technical Drawing, Business Studies, SPHE, CSPE.

### Timetable for Fifth Year:

Most of Tom's subject choices can be accommodated in our current Leaving Certificate timetable.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Class 1	Maths	Engineering	Maths		Construction
Class 2	English	English		English	Construction
Class 3	Chemistry	Study	History	LCVP French	History
Break					
Class 4	Engineering	Construction	Religion	Ent.	English
Class 5	Engineering	Construction	Engineering	Ent.	Maths
Class 6		Construction	Engineering	Maths	
Lunch					
Class 7	PE	Maths	English	History	
Class 8	PE	History	Chemistry	Chemistry	
Class 9	History		Chemistry	Chemistry	

- The *FETAC Computer Applications* course is currently run in the school, Tom could study this with an adult group on Thursday instead of LCVP French and enterprise.
- Tom has selected more subjects to study than the timetable currently facilitates. The subjects we didn't include are: Biology and Physics.
- Tom has a study slot on the timetable; this could be used to meet with his FLP mentor.

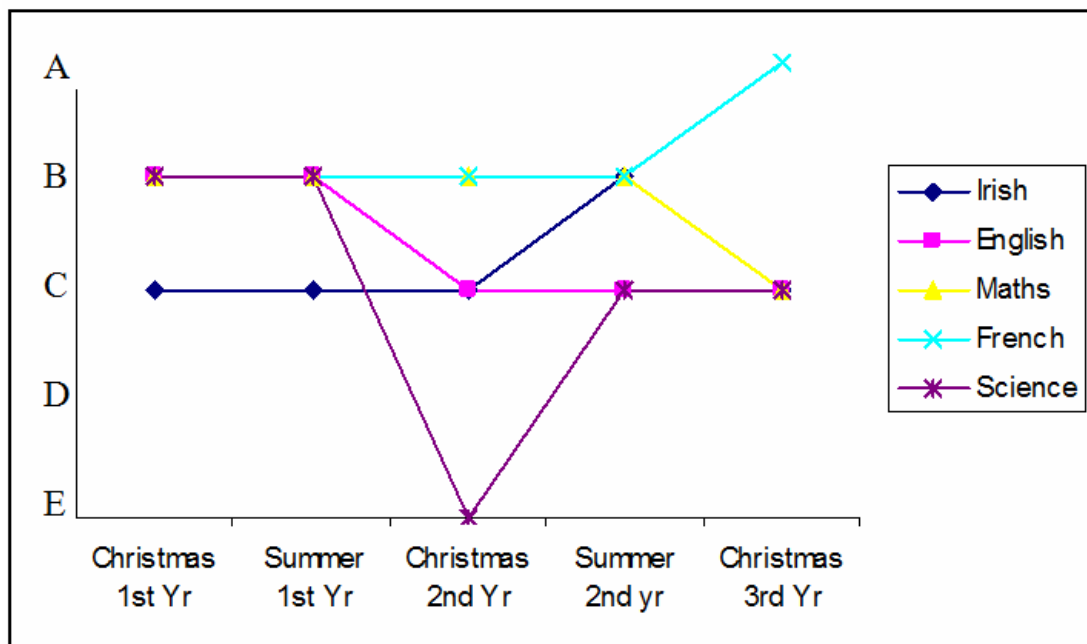
- Tom has five free periods during the week as he is exempt from Irish; this time could be spent studying an extra subject if teaching hours were available. His interest in IT could be pursued at this time.

### Case Study C: Ann

Ann is 15 years old; she is currently in third year in the Junior Certificate Programme. Ann is a quiet, friendly person; she is also very co-operative, polite and mannerly. Ann lives with her mother and younger brother. Her younger brother is in primary school.

Ann's attendance at school is good, she has missed 13 days so far this year, and her punctuality is excellent. She has a wide circle of friends. She works well in class, and has received positive reports from her tutor. Ann gets involved in school activities and is involved with clubs outside of school also. It is expected that Ann will do the Leaving Certificate traditional programme next year. She is currently taking five honours subjects (English, Maths, Business Studies, Science and Religion).

In-house assessments:



### **As a learner?**

Ann works very well; she has excellent behaviour in class. She has a good attitude towards homework. Ann has a good relationship with teachers and is working well towards exam.

### **As a person?**

Ann takes responsibility for her work and belongings; she is very good, polite and has a respectful attitude towards teachers. Ann interacts well with other students; she enjoys the friendship relationship and socially copes very well.

### **Interests/activities**

Ann spends evening times at home; she studies regularly and helps out in the home. Ann has a regular babysitting job. Ann enjoys playing sport but not in a competitive environment, she is not a member of any clubs but used to be.

### **Responses to Student Interview**

When asked about her favourite thing in school Ann responded that she likes coming in to hang around with her friends. Her favourite subject is Business Studies and her least favourite is religion. Ann's least favourite thing about school is getting homework over the weekends. When asked about senior cycle Ann said that fifth and sixth year students get to go on more trips than third year students, such as trips to visit colleges and watch plays. Ann would add physical education to senior cycle if she could.

When Ann leaves school, she would like to work in some area of business but she's not sure at what exactly. She would like to go to college but hasn't decided where yet. Ann identifies her strength as being able to get on with others and a weakness as being easily embarrassed.

### **Curriculum Planning Grid**

The subjects that Ann would most like to do are:

Leaving Certificate: Maths, English, Irish, Home Economics, Chemistry, Business Studies, LCVP Enterprise, Physical Education, and French.

Other areas of interest included:



Music Club, Work experience in a lab, FETAC: Start your own Business, FAI Soccer coaching courses, joining local sports clubs, attending French college.

### Timetable for Fifth Year:

Most of Ann's subject choices can be accommodated in our current Leaving Certificate timetable.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Class 1	Maths	Business	Maths	Irish	Home Ec.
Class 2	English	English	Irish	English	Home Ec.
Class 3	Biology	Study	French	Study	French
Break					
Class 4	Business	Home Ec.	Religion	Ent.	English
Class 5	Business	Home Ec.	Business	Ent.	Maths
Class 6	Irish	Home Ec.	Business	Maths	Irish
Lunch					
Class 7	PE	Maths	English	French	
Class 8	PE	French	Biology	Biology	
Class 9	French	Irish	Biology	Biology	

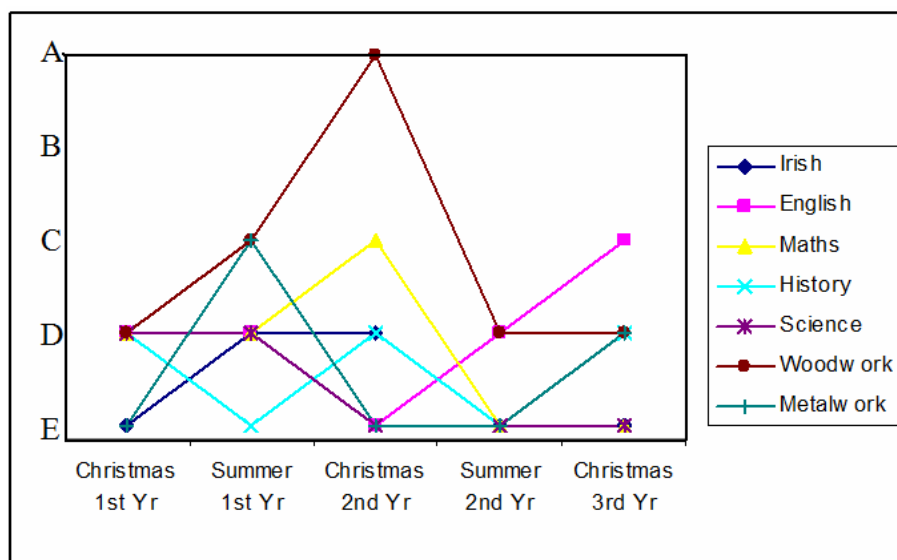
- Chemistry is currently not available but it is a subject area that the school hopes to incorporate within the next few years.
- Music club could be held at lunchtime.
- Work experience in a lab could be done during fifth year work experience as part of LCVP Enterprise.
- The *FETAC Start Your Own Business* may also be integrated into LCVP Enterprise.
- *FAI Soccer coaching* courses could be integrated as part of the PE programme.
- Ann has two study periods a week, this time could be spent with her mentor for the FLP.

## Case Study D: Jack

Jack is 15 years old; he is currently in third year in the Junior Certificate Programme. Jack lives with his father and his father's partner; he has a younger sister in first year and another brother and sister not in the school.

Jack is a very outgoing person who tends to bring negative attention to him. He can be polite and mannerly when he chooses to be. Jack's behaviour is erratic; he behaves well in some classes but not in others. He has had many suspensions and is frequently "on report." He is frequently removed from class for misbehaviour and is currently on a restricted timetable. His attendance and punctuality are quite good. Days missed are usually due to suspensions. Jack is frequently in trouble for fighting and bullying behaviour.

In-house assessments:



### As a learner?

Jack's behaviour in class can be disruptive. He does not listen well or concentrate well. Jack shows little interest in schoolwork and does not do homework.

### As a person?

Jack can be very deceptive. When he wants to, he can give the impression of being very willing and co-operative. However, he can also be rude, cheeky and disobedient.

### **Interests/activities**

Jack is interested in sports.

### **Any other information?**

Tadhg causes a lot of disruption in class and is shows lack of co-operation in the classroom. However, he regularly volunteers to help out with the distribution of food at break time.

### **Responses from Student Interview**

Jack likes to take part in sports and is a member of two clubs.

Jack's favourite thing about school is coming in to see his friends; his least favourite things are Irish and history as he likes working and would rather be working than listening.

Jack doesn't see any difference between junior cycle and senior cycle.

Jack would like to follow in his fathers footsteps and become a chef or to be a personal trainer as he likes keeping fit and helping others to keep fit. He plans on going to college to enable him to do this.

Jack identifies his strength as helping people out he identifies his weakness as his inability *to sit in class and listen instead of working.*

### **Curriculum Planning Grid**

Jack identified the following subjects as areas he would most like to study:

LC: Maths, English. Art, Construction, and FETAC: Computer Applications, Computer Programming, Start your own Business, Car Care, FAI Soccer course, FETAC: Nutrition, Athletic Coaching, and Health Related Fitness.

Other areas of interest included:

Art class after school, Construction Studies, Engineering, Solid Works, ECDL Web Design, LC Business Studies, and LCA: Food matters, Order of Malta first Aid.

### **Fifth Year Timetable:**

Jack's subject choices were difficult to facilitate. Tadgh is probably an ideal candidate for the FLP as a mixture of options from LC; LCA etc would better suit his needs. We were able to cater for the

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Class 1	Maths	Art	Maths		Construction
Class 2	English	English	IT	English	Construction
Class 3	LCA: Irish	LCA: IT	IT	LCVP French	
Break					
Class 4	Art	Construction	Religion	Ent.	English
Class 5	Art	Construction	Art	Ent.	Maths
Class 6		Construction	Art	Maths	LCA: Irish
Lunch					
Class 7	PE	Maths	English		
Class 8	PE		LCA: Irish		
Class 9					

- The *FETAC Computer Applications* award is currently run in the school, Jack could study this with an adult group on Thursday instead of LCVP French and enterprise.
- Jack mentioned in his student interview that he may like to become a chef like his father, however he didn't select any subjects to correspond to this.
- Jack is not doing well in Irish class; LCA Irish may be a better option for him.
- Computer Programming is not currently available; it could be an option if sufficient numbers were interested.
- *FETAC: Start your own Business* could be facilitated as part of LCVP
- *FAI Soccer Course* could be facilitated as part of the PE programme.
- A local sports facility offers courses in relation to being a personal trainer etc, links could be made with this facility to provide the health & fitness courses that Jack is interested in. Some of these classes take place on a Saturday, Jack could be given time off during the week in lieu of taking a Saturday class.
- Jack's interest in car care could be facilitated with links to the local community, possibly by work experience in a local garage.

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## Appendix 4

### Letter to Principals

Dear Principal,

I would like to convey the appreciation and thanks of the NCCA to you, your colleagues and your Board of Management for your school's involvement in the NCCA's Senior Cycle School Network, and in particular the work taking place in developing Flexible Learning Profiles. I am writing to inform you that €7,500 will be lodged to your account in the coming days.

From an NCCA perspective, the school network is an intrinsic part of our work on curriculum development. Our involvement with schools has improved our own thinking and actions on the senior cycle developments and we hope there have been benefits and spin-offs for the schools and teachers involved too. During the past year, the thinking in relation to flexible learning profiles has developed and deepened considerably and the emerging prototypes reflect the extent of the engagement with the work. We are now moving into a critical stage of the initiative where schools are taking control of different areas of the FLP work and making it their own. This work is crucial to informing and ultimately supporting change at the larger system level.

The monies enclosed are in general terms a gesture of appreciation for the school's willingness to participate in the school network and for its contribution to the development of senior cycle. More specifically, in the context of your school's involvement in the initiative to generate flexible learning profiles, some specific ideas for how the monies would be put to use are suggested. The particular amount arrived at is reflective of discussions at our meetings around the need to resource

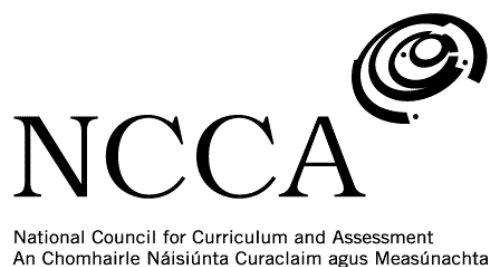
- facilitating time for the liaison person to work on the initiative
- facilitating flexible learning profile team meetings
- facilitating teachers to meet with colleagues to discuss key skills work, have working lunches and so on
- time to develop Transition Units
- time to meet with whole staff
- other expenses that might arise for the school out of the work on the senior cycle developments.

I hope these points are a helpful reminder of the ideas on spending that have been discussed. The funds provided indicate our appreciation of the need to resource curriculum developments in a meaningful way.

Once again thanks for your continuing participation. We look forward to working with you throughout 2009.

## Appendix 5

### Sample flexible learning profile



## Flexible Learning Profile

**Case study school 4**

**October 2008**

# 1. Mission statement

In a caring and innovative school, we are dedicated to fostering educational excellence, empowering all students to reach their full potential – academic and social, physical and spiritual. Through partnership, flexibility, adaptability and co-operation we openly respect and nurture the dignity and uniqueness of each individual.

# 2. Guiding principles

## **Flexibility**

The curriculum will be adapted to suit the interests, needs and aptitudes of the individual learner. We intend to move from a static learning environment to a dynamic, active way of learning within the school and community. A range of curriculum components, resources and teaching approaches will enable our teachers to meet the learners' needs by tailoring the curriculum to suit the students' individual abilities and talents.

## **Catering to the individual**

We recognise learners have a variety of talents, aspirations and needs and we will aim to develop FLPs geared towards these individual needs.

## **Student centred**

Teaching and learning will be student centred recognising the range of abilities, experience and needs of the participants. Priority will be given to the learner rather than the curriculum. A focus on key skills will help motivate and enthuse students and ensure a more student centred approach.

## **Personal responsibility**

Encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning is an aim of the FLP; this will be actively supported by significant support for learning. We recognise the need for positive parental involvement in supporting students' engagement in their learning.

## **Equality**

No student will be excluded on the basis of gender, cultural background or special educational needs. Students whose first language is not English will be fully supported in their learning. Students will be encouraged to participate fully in their own education which will lead to successful outcomes and will open up opportunities for further education and training.

## **Community based learning**

This involves a partnership with students, parents and the local community. In addition to school based learning students will have access to a wider learning experience such as work experience, online courses and relevant FETAC awards.

The school and community will act as an open ended campus with students having the advantage of using organisations outside school to advance their FLPs. Students will be given the opportunity to meet and discuss progression routes with people who work in areas of interest to them within the wider community.

### **Respectful and positive relationships**

The school fosters positive honest, courteous and respectful relationships within the school community. We recognise the variety of differences that exist between students and the need to seek to accommodate these differences.

## **3. Defining features**

### **Partnership with the community**

A partnership approach will be developed to include links with local organisations, individual members of the community and third level colleges. Students will also have access to the wider community to progress their education.

### **Flexible school organisation**

Students will not be tied to the traditional timetable but instead will have flexibility included in their school week. The use of different learning environments that are motivating and inviting to learners will provide a suitable stimulus for experiencing the fun, challenge and success of learning.

### **Appropriate assessment**

A broader range of assessment approaches will be offered - focusing more on continuous assessment, self and peer assessment, portfolios, etc. There will be a strong focus on formative assessment (AFL) including positive feedback, target setting and encouraging students to reflect on their learning.

### **Personalised learning**

The content of the FLP will be determined by the needs, talents and abilities of the participating students. This will raise standards by focusing teaching and learning on the aptitudes and interests of the students. There will be adequate provision of significant personalised support for learning which will require additional resources. There will be more emphasis on hearing the students' voice and encouraging them as partners in their own learning rather than spectators.

### **Clear progression routes**

The pursuit of excellence leading to recognised qualifications and clear progression pathways will be a feature of each student's FLP. More emphasis will be put on career guidance than is currently available. Learners will be encouraged to gain a foothold on and progress their learning with reference to the National Framework of Qualifications.

### **Use of ICT**

ICT will be fully integrated into the curriculum, as a subject and within other subjects. Wherever possible, students will be encouraged to make use of new and existing technologies to carry out their studies. ICT will also be used to facilitate the support and monitoring of student learning through the use of ePortal, IEPs, etc.

### **Love of learning**

Students will be provided with meaningful, relevant and challenging learning experiences that promote independence, enable them to grow holistically, and help



build the confidence and skills of each learner. This in turn will foster a love of learning for those involved in the FLP.

### **Teaching and learning**

The use of a wide range of teaching and learning approaches will be implemented throughout the school. Key skills will be a significant feature of each student's FLP. These approaches will motivate learners to help them see the value of what they are learning and provide them with thinking skills and learning strategies so they become more aware of themselves as learners.

## **4. Aims of the Flexible Learning Profile**

- To provide a positive, relevant, inclusive and meaningful experience for all participants
- To develop individual talents and target individual learning needs of all learners
- To motivate all learners to reach their potential academically and enable them to succeed in the wider community through the development of social and personal skills
- To provide learners with the skills and qualifications to enable them access further education, training or employment and be able to continue learning throughout their lives.

## **5. Learning & Teaching**

It is envisaged that the FLP will be different from the current provision in that each student taking part in senior cycle will have an individual education plan that will be devised with them, with their strengths and weaknesses in mind. The basis of the IEP is so that any student can make the most of their time in school to learn skills that will engage them in schoolwork, make it possible for them to reach the highest possible standard and enable them to participate and contribute positively in society.

A key distinguishing feature of FLPs will be personalised learning. This means that "the system should fit the individual rather than the individual having to fit the system" (*Choice and Voice in Personalised Learning*, David Miliband)

Personalised learning will enhance the competence and confidence of each learner by teaching them in a way that suits them best. The curriculum choice will be adapted to suit each student and they will no longer be placed in a "leaving cert" category or in a "leaving cert applied" category but instead will be able to choose from both programmes and other FETAC and community-based courses that will develop their strengths and promote a greater interest in learning.

As far as is possible the learning that takes place in the school will be practical and active. Broader methods of assessment will be employed - students will get credit for

work done, much less emphasis on terminal exams, more emphasis on project work, achieving targets, etc.

ICT will be used as a tool (not a replacement for teaching) to help improve outcomes for students, engage “hard to reach” learners, with special needs support, to build an open and accessible system with more information and on-line services for parents and carers, adult learners and employees which will allow for greater cross organisation and collaboration to improve personalised support.

Insofar as is possible, any student requiring learning support will receive it through the FLP. This will include students with special needs and students who need guidance and mentoring. With the introduction of this FLP, the learning environment is going to change to allow for flexibility and variety of learning and teaching techniques.

#### *How will be different out of class?*

The school has always promoted out of school learning and will continue to do so. This FLP is going to encourage a variety of learning environments outside of the classroom. This will enable students to develop both vocational and interpersonal skills and will give them the opportunity to develop not only as learner but as individuals and citizens in their communities.

We envisage that students will be able to spend time with people working in careers that they are interested in to further their skills in those areas. A portion of out of school learning will focus on developing interpersonal skills among students. This might involve getting students involved in social outreach programmes, personal development programmes, etc.

The students will also have the opportunity to avail of lessons in life skills which will encourage them to stand on their own two feet when they leave school. These skills will be practical in nature, focusing on the things students will need to know when they are running their own homes. Where students are studying practical subjects they will be encouraged through the use of key skills to work outside of the classroom and take part in programmes that are relevant to their subject (safe pass, first aid etc.)

Our sport department is going to expand enormously with the arrival of a new school and the FLP and many of our students will be able to reach their sporting potential on account of this. We envisage a system of credit for activities that students undertake outside of class.

In addition to this we are hoping to involve our local colleges in the FLP so that a student who is particularly interested or talented in any area may attend night classes, weekend courses, courses during holidays or parts of courses that are relevant to their schoolwork. We will also include work-based learning linked to FETAC that could lead to a recognised qualification.

#### *Difference in teaching approach*

With the introduction of key skills to the school the teaching approach has already

begun to change. Students are already beginning to engage with the key skills method and have expressed this as a preferred way of learning. We envisage that all members of staff will be *au fait* with the key skills and will incorporate them into their teaching. Our involvement in the key skills initiative has shown that students enjoy learning in an environment where they can actively engage with the subject. We believe that this approach should influence learning inside and outside of the classroom.

The student voice will be an integral part of the FLP. We believe that involving students in choices about what they learn and how they learn and personalising their learning will enable them become more involved, more committed and more responsible in their own education as well as enabling them to experience success. The role of the teacher will change to that of facilitator, acting as a guide and mentor for students.

The form of assessment will involve different methods for encouraging students to express what they have learned in different ways and will be used in conjunction with the traditional assessment methods.

## 6. Areas of learning (See attached curriculum planning grid)

1. Numeracy and literacy
2. Life skills and physical education
3. Languages
4. Guidance
5. Arts
6. Science and Technology
7. Vocational Education
8. Personal, moral and civic education

## 7. The world of work

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## 8. Curriculum planning

See attached curriculum planning grid which shows possibilities the school will consider offering to students in their FLP

## 9. Assessment

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## 10. Planning for Flexible Learning Profiles

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## 11. Guidance

According to the 1998 Education Act section 9(c), the guidance counselling that takes place is the responsibility of the “whole school”. The primary responsibility lies with the guidance councillor but other staff members also have important contributions to make to the planning and delivery of many aspects of guidance. Parents, students and representatives of the local community will also be consulted and actively involved in the guidance programme in the school.

The intention of guidance is to support and enable learners to make wise and informed personal, educational and career choices, in addition to development of attitudes and personal awareness, of deeper understanding and appreciation of self and self-management. It is not just for career issues but also to help students address behavioural issues, develop coping strategies and become learners that are more effective.

The NCCA framework for guidance suggests students follow a programme where there are 3 areas involved in guidance - personal, educational and career guidance. This opens up areas of guidance to students that up to now have not been available, including personal counselling which would be of huge benefit to our students and is not currently available. The FLP will require a councillor to be available to all students as part of the developmental learning process and at moments of personal crisis. We would like to see this area opened up to students under the FLP umbrella.

Guidance for education is another area not currently available to students with the exception of a study skills seminar once at junior cycle and once at senior cycle. We would like to see guidance for education embedded in the FLP curriculum in all subjects, where students are shown how to take responsibility for their own learning.

Because of the current provision for career guidance, only students at senior cycle are benefiting from it. This situation will change with the introduction of FLPs in the school. A full time Guidance Councillor will be required to address the needs of a changing school environment and to continue to guide our students into areas where they have talents or interests.

Students will be able to avail of one-to-one guidance, careers classes, group counselling, etc.

From 1<sup>st</sup> year, students will be tracked regarding their hobbies and interests. A resume

of their talents, hobbies and interests will be carried out on their first term in school by asking them to complete a survey. This information will be put into a database which will be updated regularly.

Activities such as the Monday afternoon sport and a variety show, along with regular classes, will be used to help students identify their strengths.

In 2<sup>nd</sup> year, students could attend careers classes whereby people in different careers will come into the school and give talks. This will include past pupils and college students. There is also a need to have some contact with parents and one to one time with students. 2<sup>nd</sup> years could complete a study of career options linked to careers they are interested in.

In 3<sup>rd</sup> year, students will be helped to prepare for exams, homework and study. They will get guidance to prepare them for senior cycle and make appropriate choices in relation to their FLP.

At senior cycle all FLP students will be given significant support incorporating personal, educational and career guidance which will be led by a the Guidance Counsellor but will involve a wider team.

## 12. Support for Learning

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## 13. Timetable

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## 14. Resources

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## Appendix 6

### Curriculum Planning Grid

This is a sample of a curriculum planning grid for case study school 4. This outlines for each of the areas of learning listed below, the possible options that a learner might choose in a given area from Leaving Certificate subjects, Transition Units, Leaving Certificate Applied courses, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme link modules, work based learning, community based learning, FETAC awards and so on.

- Numeracy and literacy
- Life skills and physical education
- Languages
- Guidance
- Arts
- Science and Technology
- Vocational Education
- Personal, moral and civic education.







<b>Areas of learning</b>	<b>Leaving Cert subjects</b>	<b>Transition units</b>	<b>LC Applied course</b>	<b>LCVP</b>	<b>Work based learning</b>	<b>Community based learning</b>	<b>FETAC awards</b>	<b>School-developed courses</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Numeracy</b>	Maths	Maths 4 fun	Mathematical Applications				C10139 Mathematics		
<b>Literacy</b>	English	Creative writing Film studies Soap operas and pop culture Reading the silver screen	English and Comm Drama			Book club	G10001 Communications G20001 Communications E10117 Drama		Drama classes
<b>Arts</b>	Art Music History Geography Design & Comm Graphics	Discovering Irish Art  Articats	Craft and Design Dance Music Visual Art		WBL Art studio Dance studio	Pottery course/ Interior design  Working in a recording studio	A20071 Graphic design E20001 Dance E20009 Music E20011 Photography A10017 Drawing A10190 Painting	Music club	Art class after school  Learning to play an instrument-link to Gaisce
<b>Science and Technology</b>	Biology Home Ec Construction Studies Engineering Chemistry Physics		Science ICT Technology Engineering Graphics & Construction studies Agriculture & Horticulture		WBL in Sc & Tech workplace	ITEC anatomy and physiology diploma	C10163 Everyday science D20001 Anatomy & physiology C20153 Animal A&P C10207 Human biology	Young scientist  ECDL  Web design  Email	It is envisaged that IT will be an integral part of all subject areas

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Areas of learning	Leaving Cert subjects	Transition units	LC Applied course	LCVP	Work based learning	Community based learning	FETAC awards	School-developed courses	Other
							C20140 Nutrition C20033 Lab. techniques B10135 IT skills C20006 Biology B10009 Computer applications C10070 Tech Dr A10203 Woodcraft C10016 Electronics A10217 Metal craft C20008 Building construction C20013 Computer programming		
<b>Vocational Education</b>	Business Studies		Vocational Preparation & Guidance	Enterprise			W10008 Work exp W20008 Work exp B20153 Start your own business D20105 Hairdressing	This will be developed around the student so we'll have to see what kind of work	Career guidance-see NCCA guidance framework

Areas of learning	Leaving Cert subjects	Transition units	LC Applied course	LCVP	Work based learning	Community based learning	FETAC awards	School-developed courses	Other
							Science D20030 Hairdressing theory & practice	they are interested in	
Personal/ Social and Moral Education	SPHE  CSPE  Religion	'A Level Playing Field' Setting up a Green school	RE  SPHE  Social education				GI0033/2 Personal and interpersonal effectiveness G20033 Personal effectiveness in the workplace G20031 Social studies		Religion
Life skills		Food matters	Hotel, Catering & Tourism Office Admin & Customer Care	CV preparation	WBL	Order of Malta first aid Safe Pass Safe handling	B20153 Start your own business D10124 Child care D20005 Child development C10201 Plant care and maintenance		Car care  Household DIY  Budgeting for living

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<b>Areas of learning</b>	<b>Leaving Cert subjects</b>	<b>Transition units</b>	<b>LC Applied course</b>	<b>LCVP</b>	<b>Work based learning</b>	<b>Community based learning</b>	<b>FETAC awards</b>	<b>School-developed courses</b>	<b>Other</b>
Physical Education	PE		Active Leisure module		WBL	FAI Soccer Coaching courses Personal trainer course	C20140 Nutrition D20114 Athletic coaching D20174 Occupational first aid D20123 Health related fitness D20160 Exercise and fitness	Learn to play a new sport Compete in a sport- link to Gaisce	Local sports clubs
Languages	Irish  French		Irish  Modern Languages				E10110 Irish E20110 Irish E10106 French E20106 French E20164 English as a second language		Gaeltacht  Student exchange to France  French college

