

Summary	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Research Objective & Terms of Reference	4
3. Methodology	5
4. Background to Current Project	6
5. The Process to Date	13
6. Findings	18
7. Conclusions and Recommendations	26
Bibliography	29

Summary

St. Joseph's Training Centre has successfully offered and delivered the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) to 14 men and women from the Travelling Community in the academic year 2004 - 2006. This was the first occasion that the LCA was offered in the Centre. From a low base of academic achievement amongst the 14 Learners, there are strong recordable impacts in relation to the project's stated goals viz. attendance, academic progress and achievement and personal development. In addition, participants have benefited through increased social skills, civic participation, workplace preparation and the capacity to positively influence their children's education.

Final results achieved by the participants were 3 distinctions, 10 merits and 1 pass. These results are considered to be a very significant achievement. For Centre staff, the decision to offer the LCA has proven extremely worthwhile. For most of the Learners, their achievements have surpassed their expectations.

In the immediate aftermath of the publication of the LCA results, two participants have succeeded in gaining employment. Six others are considering participation on a new BTEI course in the centre whilst the remaining six are working with the FÁS Advocate, the Enterprise Worker and/or St. Joseph's to explore their options.

The challenges and constraints of running a programme designed for 16 – 18 year olds in mainstream school settings in an STTC are considerable – timetabling, attendance requirements, supporting those who are new to such education rather than having recently graduated from Junior Cert, accommodation, disposition of learners and staffing requirements are all challenges. The consequent task of adapting a national programme to local target group requirements has been met with considerable success.

The operation of the LCA has had positive impacts on the entire Centre and other Learners as it has set new standards and helped create new role models. It has also challenged all the Centre's Learners to think of their learning in a developmental way rather than being a straight exchange of learning hours for a training allowance

Learners have achieved a national educational standard and the success of the programme can be assessed within the context of the promotion of lifelong learning as well as labour market preparation. It should be recognised that there are multiple obstacles to achieving job-readiness,

many of which are outside the scope of the LCA and the Centre. However, workplace linkage could be improved with additional time and resources dedicated to it within the context of the LCA.

A number of recommendations about the future delivery of the programme are made.

1 Introduction

St. Joseph's Training Centre is an education and training centre for Travellers aged 16 and over in the Clare area. It is one of 33 such centres nationally. It caters for 52 Learners, the large majority of whom are over 25 years of age. The centre is operated by County Clare VEC and is managed by an inter-departmental committee representative of Clare V.E.C., Travellers, Bishops Representative, An Garda Síochána, Clare County Council (Community & Enterprise Directorate), Teachers' Representative, FÁS Advocate.

The centre's mission is "to cater for the educational, training and personal needs of all our Learners". Further objectives include giving pride in the Traveller culture, holistic development of the person, empowerment of individuals, literacy development amongst families and networking with other agencies providing services to Travellers.*

(* St Joseph's Training Centre, 2004, p.17)

The Centre began as a Combat Poverty programme in 1974, offering practical subjects under the management of ANCO (now FÁS) and the VEC. As recently as 1997, the Centre had an enrolment of just 24 Learners. In 1998, the Department of Education & Science took over sole responsibility for Senior Traveller Training Centres nationally, an outcome of the Task Force on Travelling Community of 1995.

In 1998, just 9 portfolios were presented for national certification by Learners. By 2004, there were over 100 and the Centre had increased to 52 places. The vast majority of these (44) are adults aged 25 years and over. The scale of the educational challenge can be gauged by specific indicators e.g. the average age on leaving school of the current enrolment was 12.9 years; the average number of years spent in secondary school was .39 years; the average reading age is 10 years.* In that period, the Centre has also added adult males to its catchment of Learners.

(* St Joseph's Training Centre, 2004, p. 6)

In 2004, the Centre introduced the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in order to offer Learners skills in personal learning and a progression route or stepping-stone towards employment and/or further study.

2 Research Objective & Terms of Reference

This review studies the impacts on the centre and its Learners of the introduction of LCA to the Centre. Other objectives include

- To document the process of starting up LCA provision in the centre – including staffing, resources, recruitment, selection, accommodation etc
- To describe the programme including its methodologies, resources, etc
- To examine the centre's capacity to meet the challenges posed in offering the service
- To record the expectations of participants and explore the motivating factors and barriers to their decision to participate
- To record the roles of all stakeholders
- To record the impacts/outcomes on the participants and the centre
- To describe and review linkage to workplace, further training or other progression
- To make recommendations

3 Methodology

The method of inquiry is as follows:

- Review of relevant policies and practices
- Description of operational context and target group in Ennis
- Review of internal records
- Participant observation
- Individual structured qualitative interviews with all participants
- Structured qualitative interviews with key staff of St. Joseph's Training Centre -

Helen O'Sullivan, Director; Mary Reid, Education Support Worker; Triona Lynch, LCA Coordinator; Danny Comerford, Tutor; Brian Crossan, Tutor; Martha Whelan, Tutor

- Structured qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and external groups -

Ms. Sheila O' Driscoll, National Coordinator, Leaving Certificate Applied; Ms. Deirdre Toomey, Coordinator, Ennis Community Development Project; Ms. Patricia Ryan, FÁS Advocate; Ms. Helen Brooks, Traveller Enterprise Officer, Clare Traveller Strategy Group; Mr. Michael O' Riordan, Visiting Teacher for Travellers, County Clare; Mr. Gerard Griffin, National Coordinator of Senior Traveller Training Centres.

- Structured qualitative interviews with all participant Learners
- Structured qualitative interviews with selection of employers who provided work placements.

4 Background to Current Project

National Context – Traveller Education

The Travelling Community in Ireland consists of approximately 28,000 people who live nomadic, semi-nomadic or settled lives*. They experience significant, documented barriers to educational participation and attainment. In particular, high rates of illiteracy exist (cf. Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995).

(*The 2002 Census of Population records 23, 681 Travellers but there has traditionally been under-recording in this category)

Travellers are relative newcomers to the formal education system and education policy towards them has evolved considerably over the past thirty years. In the 1960s, only 114 Traveller children attended school regularly (Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, 1963).

Between 1970 and 1990, the Department of Education favoured the setting up of special, Traveller-only classes in mainstream schools. This policy was changed when the 1995 Task Force Report on the Travelling Community stated that “access to mainstream provision must be regarded as the norm for Travellers.” Integrated provision was also recommended in ‘Charting our Education Future’ (1995 White Paper). The Department of Education & Science has adopted these recommendations. Current policy is summarised in the Department’s 1999 resource pack:

“ The policy of the Departmentis that all Traveller children will be integrated fully into the life of the school. In future, there will be no special class, no special roll, no special unit and no special teacher in schools that enrol Traveller children. The Traveller child will be treated like any other pupil except that he/she will get extra remedial help from a Resource Teacher for Travellers where this is deemed necessary arising from an educational assessment.” (Traveller Education: Resource Pack for Use in Primary Schools p.20)

Whereas Traveller attendance in the formal education system did not significantly increase in the thirty years between 1962 and 1992, the subsequent changes have been profound as recent second level participation rates shows:

	Traveller Enrolment in mainstream post- primary schools						
Year	1992	1995	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003
No.	100	300	600	962	1178	1381	1608

(Source: Department of Education)

Until recently, the issue in relation to Traveller education has been identified primarily in terms of participation. With participation on a very significant increase, there is now a greater focus on retention, attainment and progression. Transfer to second level and high drop out rates in the junior cycle of second level are areas that are agreed as needing major improvement.

Whilst there are now almost 5900 Traveller children in primary schools and 1600 at second level nationwide, retention remains a significant issue. Traveller retention rate to Junior Certificate is 51% compared to a national average of 94%.

(Source: Department of Education)

Barriers to attainment also remain stubborn for this generation of Traveller children who are the first to attend the formal education system in such numbers. The growth in participation levels does not, in itself, remove barriers to educational achievement. Other identified factors include

- Home environment often lacks suitable space and facilities for study or homework or other educational activity
- Parents have little confidence in helping with homework
- Financial pressures
- Few role models who have benefited from the formal education system

Senior Traveller Training Centres

There are 33 STTCs across the country and a further 3 outreach centres. At the end of 2004, there were 981 Learners enrolled, of whom 799 (81%) were female and 182 (19%) were male. All Learners are over 15 years of age but there is no upper limit. 248 (25%) Learners were under 18 years of age. The majority of those attending are between 18 and 45 years of age.

There is no upper age limit in order to encourage “adults who may have previously had negative experiences of mainstream education and also to attract adults given the positive influence this could have on encouraging their children’s participation in schooling.”

(Department of Education & Science, draft, 2005, p.23)

The STTCs provide a programme of general education, vocational training, and work experience, guidance/counselling/psychological services. Learners are paid a training allowance. A childcare allowance is also payable, where applicable.

According to the Department of Education & Science, the “aim of Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres is to provide participants with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to successfully make the transition to work and adult life, and to participate fully in their communities.”

The learning environment in STTCs is a challenging one for staff and Learners alike. In the Department of Education & Science’s 2004 Survey of STTCs, the directors of each centre were asked to state the number of Learners who displayed named difficulties in learning. Although the assessments are subjective, the results illustrate the extent of the task for both the learners and those providing the tuition and the learning environment.

STTC Directors’ views of the number of persons presenting the following difficulties on 31st December 2004

	No. (of 950)	%
Literacy/Numeracy difficulties	536	56
Need for sustained psychological support	175	18
Specific learning needs	136	14
Health difficulties	164	17
Accommodation problems	143	15
Dysfunctional family backgrounds/lack of family	242	25
Two or more of the above	237	25

(Adapted from Department of Education & Science, 2005 p.3)

Presently the Department of Education & Science is carrying out an expenditure review of STTCs in consultation with Department of Finance. The aim of the review is to

- Provide a systematic analysis of what is being achieved by expenditure on each programme.
- Provide a basis on which more informed decisions can be made on priorities within and between expenditure programmes.

Appropriate recommendations for the future of the programmes will be made.

Local Context - Traveller Education

Ennis is the tenth largest population centre in the Irish State with a population of 22051 in the urban area. The Traveller population is 513 persons - 23 Travellers per 1,000 of total population. Of these, approximately, 200 are under 15 years of age.

(Source: CSO, Census of Population, 2002, Volume 8)

Approximately 2% of the state's Traveller population reside in Ennis. These figures may be slightly understated due to the presence of Traveller encampments on the outskirts of the town but outside the urban boundary. Seasonal fluctuations also apply.

The numbers participating in the formal education system for 2004 were approximately as follows:

Pre-school – 20

Primary – 150

Secondary – 43

Youthreach -10

15 –18 year olds attending St. Joseph's Senior Training Centre - 17

Adults attending St. Joseph's Senior Training Centre – 35

In 2004, 26 Traveller pupils transferred from primary to post-primary in Ennis. Although this figure dipped to 16 in 2005, it has been averaging over 20 in the past few years. The current challenge is to support these pupils to stay and achieve in mainstream second level schools. Support for these children through resources and supports for schools, family support, education of their parents to assist them and the appropriate application of the Education Welfare Act is needed.

Age profile of Irish Travellers

The age profile of Irish Travellers is a very important consideration when assessing people's motivation to learn as well as their future ambitions. This profile has stark contrasts to that of the total population. Earlier mortality and lower mean ages are the key differences.

The following table illustrates the extent of the divergence:

% Of Traveller and Total Population at various ages

	0 - 14	15 - 24	25 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65+
% of Travellers	42.2	20.5	24.2	6.2	3.7	3.3
% of Total Population	21.2	16.4	30.1	12.3	9	11.1

(Source: CSO, Census of Population, 2002, Volume 8)

Two out of every five Travellers were aged 15 years or less in 2002, compared with one in five for the population as a whole. Travellers aged 65 years and over accounted for just 3.3% of the total Traveller population compared with 11.1% for the general population. The median age of Travellers is 18 compared with an overall national figure of 32.

Such early mortality must be taken into account when assessing the motivation to train or prepare for labour market participation.

Leaving Certificate Applied

The Leaving Certificate Applied was first introduced nationally in 1995 to more fully recognise and develop the range of skills and intelligences of all students. It is a self-contained two-year programme that puts an emphasis on forms of achievement and excellence that the established Leaving Certificate had not recognised in the past.

The three principal elements of the LCA are 1) vocational preparation, 2) vocational education and 3) general education.

The primary objective of the Leaving Certificate Applied is to prepare participants for transition from the world of the school/centre to that of adult and working life. The programme

- Has as a primary objective the development of the participants' literacy and numeracy skills
- Places a premium on the personal and social development of participants
- Provides opportunities to develop the participants' processes of self-evaluation and reflection
- Encourages strong community links to complement the school or centre as a learning site

- Promotes the use of a broad range of teaching methodologies and participant-centred learning
- Provides access to further education and training.*

(* cf. website of National Council For Curriculum and Assessment www.ncca.ie)

Courses are designed on a modular basis and are of thirty hours duration. Each year is divided into two sessions (September to January and February to May) over the two-year duration of the programme. Learners must take a total of 44 modules. They are also required to complete seven Student Tasks over the two years of the programme.

In addition to general education and vocational preparation, two courses are selected from the following Vocational Specialisms:

- Agriculture/Horticulture
- Hotel Catering and Tourism
- Engineering
- Technology
- Office Administration and Customer Care
- Childcare/Community Care
- Graphics and Construction Studies
- Craft and Design
- Hair and Beauty
- Information and Communications Technology
- Active Leisure Studies
- Four elective modules must also be chosen

Over 250 centres including schools, Youthreach centres and six STTCs offer the LCA nationally. According to the most recent National Council for Curriculum Assessment survey (for 2000) of LCA graduates, 91% are employed or attending further education in the year immediately following completion of the course.

(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2001)

There are no available breakdowns progression routes for *adult* LCA graduates but anecdotal evidence suggests that their academic attainment is higher than the average but that their progression to successful labour market participation is lower than the average. Where the latter

has happened, the main progression routes are into further study or childcare or social care employment.

The LCA is endorsed by IBEC and ISME as a successful work preparation programme. However, as yet, no evaluation of the LCA in a non-formal sector (e.g. Youthreach or Senior Traveller Training Centre) has taken place.

One of the reasons for high attainment at LCA assessment in the non –formal sector is the experience of the teachers in that sector with one –to-one methodologies and their experience of working with low reliance on text books.

The extent to which progression is influenced by specific factors (e.g. the retention of secondary benefits, the relevance of the qualification, the effectiveness of workplace linkages, fear of leaving the STTC environment etc) has not been subject to evaluation nationally.

Outside of STTCs, LCA is rarely offered to adult learners. Three schools in Dublin have previously offered it and just one continues to do so. Therefore, on account of LCA being primarily offered to young people for whom subsequent labour market participation or further study is seen as the norm, it is difficult to compare outcomes for adults in one setting (e.g. St Joseph's) with outcomes for a large number of adults nationally because such numbers do not exist.

5 The Process to Date

As the centre continued to expand in the years post 1998, the Director and staff at the Centre began to explore the feasibility and desirability of offering higher-level qualifications that would meet the needs of Learners who had achieved basic competencies. Such Learners needed entry into a framework of lifelong learning opportunities and/ or an effective progression route to preparation for labour market participation. In addition, the creation of role models for intergenerational learning within the local Travelling Community was considered a desirable goal.

Amongst the reasons to explore the LCA as an option were:

1. To offer an educational progression route in the Centre that would have national status and certification
2. LCA was considered by staff to both meet the needs and build on the skills and potential of the target group. It combines practical and academic learning. Its status amongst Learners and recognition by employers is high.
3. Offering the LCA was seen as a means of creating awareness amongst adults of the challenges of a structured programme where attendance, participation and application are essential for successful completion. It was believed that this would result in 'trickle-down' effect and assist parents to support their children in the discipline and application required for achievement at second level education.
4. The growth of the Centre in recent years resulted in increased resources and enabled the introduction of the LCA.
5. Younger Learners were presenting with higher literacy skills and more years experience of full-time education, especially at second level.
6. Need for a higher level programme than existing provision at the Centre and a general need to 'raise the bar'. There was a general feeling amongst Centre staff that the level of qualification on offer was not meeting some Learners' needs. A number of staff had taught LCA modules in other locations and felt that it would be worthwhile for the Centre to offer it to such Learners.

The following section outlines the preparatory phase and Years 1 and 2 of the implementation of the programme.

Planning Phase

In late 2003, a team was formed to progress the issue. This consisted of the Director, Educational Support Worker and a tutor. They sought and got assistance from the National Coordinator for LCA at The Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) in Shannon. Visits to the LCA programme at STTCs in Ballinasloe and Loughrea, including discussions with Learners there, validated the earlier view that the LCA was both possible and desirable to implement in Ennis.

In January 2004, a tutor on the team was asked to coordinate the project in St. Joseph's with a brief to offer the programme in September of that year. Although mainstream schools are funded to allocate four hours weekly to such a post, there is no provision for a post of responsibility in STTCs.

The 'appointment' and the short lead-in phase are exemplary of the challenges and need for flexibility that was central to the process of getting the programme going. For instance, the new post entailed an additional four hours paid work rather than being a new post of responsibility. Without specific management, staff or accommodation resources in place, the timetable was tight. On top of this was the inability to predict with any degree of certainty what the likely take-up would be once the recruitment and application phase began in earnest.

After the appointment of a Coordinator, consultation took place with prospective Learners regarding the subjects to be offered. As far as possible, these would be reflective of Learners' and Travellers' work culture. The availability of existing staff was also a factor. In practice, the subjects were similar to those already offered at the Centre but at a higher level and with some different methodologies.

Throughout this period, continuing support was offered from the CDU in Shannon who visited the Centre on five occasions and received visits at their offices also for support meetings.

Selection and recruitment

When advertising and promoting the programme initially, it was clear that some applicants just wanted to be Learners rather than do the LCA – 54 application forms were sent out to potential applicants inside and outside the Centre and 50 of these applied. Each of these was called back and the programme was clarified. On foot of this, 26 were returned and of these, 24 were interviewed and 18 selected. There were 12 men and 6 women. Four were teenagers. The 18 selected represented 35% of the total enrolment at the Centre. In the early weeks of Year 1, there were three drop-outs and a further one after three months. Therefore, there was a consistent enrolment of 14 Learners. Many of the group were related as parent/child, uncle/nephew etc.

It is interesting to note that initial selection interviews were held late on a Friday afternoon, a time when Learners would not normally be present at the Centre. This was a deliberate attempt to ascertain genuine interest and commitment. Many were still there after 6 p.m. on the Friday of interviews. This was taken to be demonstrative of a strong desire on the part of Learners to embark on a course that would demand a new level of commitment and application

Trainee/Student Profile

The profile of the 14 participants as follows:

Gender	5 female, 9 male
Age range	18 – 46 years – average early 30s
Marital Status	12 married, 2 single
Parental Status	11 are parents
Average age on leaving school	All – 13.3 years; Male 14.1 years; Female 11.8 years
Average number of years in Centre	2.2 years

Reasons for Participation

Students were asked to list their motivation for enrolling on LCA according to the following options – To get a job; Personal development; Help children/grandchildren; Other (state).

Q. Why did you decide to do the Leaving Cert Applied? Rank the following options –

To get a job; For Personal Development; To help your children or grandchildren; Other (please state)

Ranked No. 1	Male	Female	Total
For Personal Development	4	2	6
To get a job	4	0	4
To help children/ grandchildren	1	3	4

The results showed that personal development, getting a job and assisting their children ranked almost equally as motivating factors, with personal development being statistically most common. However, there is strong differentiation by gender.

This is also an age variation in these responses with younger males being most likely to see the LCA as a route to a job and older females more inclined to use new skills to benefit their children and families.

Curriculum

As described above, a consultation and planning phase was undertaken to determine the optimum curriculum, taking into account both the learners' needs and the Centre's capacity to deliver. This resulted in the following curriculum

Vocational Preparation	Vocational Preparation and Guidance	
	English and Communications	
Vocational Education	Mathematical Applications	
	Vocational Specialisms	
	Information Technology	All: Graphics & Construction Men: Engineering Women: Hair & Beauty
General Education	Arts Education	
	Social Education	
	Languages	
Elective Courses	Extra Information Technology	
	Religious Education	
7 Personal Tasks in	Visual Arts, Enterprise, Graphics & Construction, Contemporary Issues, Hair & Beauty <u>or</u> Engineering, Personal Achievement, Personal Reflection.	

In addition, work experience (four weeks in each academic year) and career guidance were put in place. There was provision made for ongoing individual supports as required at end of the two

years to produce career plans. The service of the FÁS Advocate and the Traveller Enterprise Officer were also built into the programme.

FÁS Advocate - The Centre has the services of a FÁS Advocate for two hours per week. In practice, the Advocate spends considerably in excess of this in the Centre and is also a member of the Board of Management. She has been involved in planning of the LCA and has worked with the LCA participants individually and collectively.

Traveller Enterprise Officer - This position has come about through the development of the Plan for the Integrated Delivery of Public Services to Travellers in County Clare. The TEO has been responsible for linking Travellers to employers and has assisted in the placing of several people in jobs with public sector and private employers. Whilst her engagement with the LCA Learners has been preparatory and exploratory in nature to date, it takes on greater relevance and intensity now that the course is complete and the qualification has been achieved.

Staffing

All staff are deployed from existing staff hours, a factor that makes scheduling and timetabling difficult. In total, twelve internal staff including the LCA coordinator, the Centre's Director and Education Support Worker give inputs to the course.

Work Placements

Work placements take place in two-week blocs in each academic year. A teacher is assigned to assist each student access a placement. The placements are designed to give a taste of workplace conditions and culture and to give students an opportunity to apply skills that they have learnt.

6 Findings

Issues arising in early weeks and months of Programme

Amongst the issues arising and learning from these first months were

- Timetabling – The Centre had a considerable challenge to manage the timetable from existing staff resources and to accommodate the hours for which Learners were paid. In the first term, the timetable changed five times and room configuration needed changing, demanding considerable flexibility from both staff and Learners.
- In the early weeks, the Learners had to get used to a higher standard of learning and more intense participation than that to which they were accustomed. All have stated these weeks were very testing for them and three dropped out at this stage. Each of these were in their early 20s and were unwilling to attend for full rather than half days.
- A basic standard of literacy amongst those selected is necessary. Otherwise, there is a need to provide intensive tuition. This is considered undesirable as a) it puts intense pressure on Learners at a time when they have embarked on a tough, new programme and b) it puts a stress on the Centre's resources. If a gap in literacy needs to be bridged, this suggests the need for an LCA qualifier or preparatory course.
- Due to the teaching hours available, three different teachers initially taught Irish. This caused instability especially as the Learners already considered the subject very difficult. As a result, a single teacher was recruited.
- Initially classes were of mixed gender. This caused stress and tension. Men had only entered the Centre for the first time in 1998. They began by coming in for evening activities. The LCA was the first attempt at gender integration in tuition settings. After the first few weeks, the women approached the Director to explain that it wasn't what either gender felt comfortable with.
- Disparities in ability, especially between young and older Learners can cause difficulties. Classes have contained a range of communications skills from Junior Cert English to barely literate. Younger Learners tend to be more literate and have greater levels of education but they can be disruptive whilst adults concentrate better and often have higher motivation.

- Work level was frontloaded in year 1. Consideration of this needed for future intakes. It necessitated having a lot of one-to-one supports. The LCA did not have guidelines on this and St Joseph's devised its own.
- The establishment of the LCA led to a change in atmosphere in the Centre with some other Learners feeling undervalued due to a perception that extra resources and field trips etc were being excessively targeted at the LCA group. Much of this feeling dissipated as the workload of the LCA became obvious and as others began to consider whether they should aspire to doing it themselves in the future.

Impacts on Learners

In order to assess Learners' educational background, they were asked to describe their experience of school as children.

How would you describe your experience of education as a child? (in our own words)	N=
Persons describing it in negative terms	11
Persons describing it as an 'ok' experience	3
Persons describing it in positive terms	0

A common phrase used by Learners to describe their childhood education is 'I hated it, I couldn't wait to leave'. Some didn't mind it but said that they didn't get a lot out of it. Crafts and practical subjects were regarded as more interesting. In general, the younger ones found school less difficult but saw it as normal to leave early.

Learners were then asked to describe their current experience.

How would you describe your current experience of the LCA? (in our own words)	N=
Persons describing it in negative terms	0
Persons describing it as an 'ok' experience	0
Persons describing it in positive terms	14

All Learners described the experience in positive terms. Five participants said that they were enjoying it. The word 'enjoy' is deemed significant as it is not one that they would have thought could be applied to an educational experience.

'Good but tough' or difficult is a common observation. Other views include:

'I'm glad I came back to education'; 'I'm learning a lot about myself'; 'you get support from the rest of the group' and 'I've achieved more than I ever thought I would'.

Common dislikes were French, Irish and the general high workload.

Initial experiences of school had been negative for the target. That they now experience usefulness and even enjoyment from education is a very positive result.

Indicators

Indicators of impacts on learners include: attendance levels, self-confidence levels, LCA assessment, Increased community and civic activity, Use of new skills in situation outside the course and Centre, progression to labour market activity and/or further training/education

Attendance levels:

All participants have achieved the 90% attendance requirement for the LCA. This is approximately 10% higher than average attendance levels across the centre.

Self-confidence levels:

The majority of Learners feel that they have improved self-confidence as a result of doing the course. This could be seen in the recent visit by the RTE Nationwide crew to the Centre. Twelve of the fourteen Learners made themselves available for an experience that scares many people, not least other Learners. Many of the group participated in the recent Clare 10K Fun Run and have taken part in other public events.

What effect has doing the course had on your general level of self- confidence? Give examples	N=
Improved self-confidence	9
Same as before	5

Typical examples include:

'Not holding up the queue at ATM machines any more'

'Family and friends now ask for help in filling out forms'

'Feel more equal with other people because I can do more'

'Don't need to ask for help as much'

Increased community and civic activity:

There is little evidence of increased voluntary work or membership of external organisations. However, take-up of activities such as the Fun Run indicates increased willingness to get involved in new and public activities.

Use of new skills in situation outside the course and Centre:

When asked to describe reading or reasoning activities outside the course, Learners can point to examples that suggest that they are, to a degree, applying their learning in external and everyday situations e.g. helping children with homework, filling forms for others, etc.

Participation in other literacy-based civic activities was assessed:

	Yes	No
Are you registered to vote?	10	4
Can you vote?	13	1
Do you vote?	8	6

Do you read a newspaper regularly? Which one(s)?	N=
Yes	11
No	3

The Clare People is perceived as laid out in an accessible way and is popular. The Clare Champion is seen as more difficult. British tabloids are popular with the men.

Awareness of children's homework needs and the patterns involved in falling behind at school have increased, giving participants more confidence in dealing with teachers and seeking help. For some, however, negative experiences from their own initial education remains a powerful barrier to gaining confidence in supporting their children's education.

Has the experience helped you in assisting with children's homework and education?	N=
Yes	3
No	7
Not Applicable	4

Interaction with text through newspapers, forms, signage etc has significantly increased and improved. When asked, two participants said that they have read a book in recent times. Others have been reading fiction books during break times at the Centre.

At a more general level, Learners have greater confidence in accessing services, especially information services such as the Ennis CIC (Citizens Information Centre) and the local Partnership Company, Ennis West Partners.

LCA assessment:

The Leaving Certificate Applied is assessed as follows:

Satisfactory Completion of Modules	31%
Seven Student Tasks	35%
Final Examinations	34%

Certificates are awarded at three levels: Pass (60 – 64%), Merit (70 – 84%) and Distinction (85 – 100%).

Modules and tasks have had very positive results. In assessments to January 2006, with 55% of the total course assessed, three students have achieved Merit and 11 have achieved Distinction.

Final results achieved by the participants were 3 distinctions, 10 merits and 1 pass. By any standards, this is a great achievement by staff and students. The goal of providing the students with a nationally-based educational standard has been met with great success.

Progression to labour market activity and/or further training/education

National Council for Curriculum & Assessment data on the first destination of LCA graduates show the following immediate outcomes for all students and Learners across the country. There is no further breakdown available for Youthreach, STTCs or others in the non-formal sector.*

Employment	37%
Further study	34%**
Apprenticeships	14%
Seeking employment	4%
Unknown or unavailable for work	9%

(* NCCA, 2001, p.3 **CERT 3%, FÁS 2%, Teagasc 1%, PLCs 28%. Note that 2001 was the last Destination Study. NCCA intend to conduct one for 2006 graduates)

In the immediate aftermath of the publication of the LCA results, two participants have succeeded in gaining employment. Six others are considering participation on a new BTEI course in VEC's Adult Education Centre whilst the remaining six are working with the FAS advocate, the Enterprise Worker and/or St. Joseph's to explore their options.

One of the positions is a local authority Clerical Officer (part-time). The other has taken up a position in St. Joseph's as a Classroom Assistant. Both positions will require the deployment of the academic skills and the personal confidence gained through the LCA course. One other participant was accepted for a Community Employment position with the organisation where she had completed a work placement but, under the new FÁS criteria, she was not deemed eligible.

As stated in an earlier section, across the country LCA is rarely offered to adult learners. Therefore, it is difficult to compare outcomes and progression routes for learners at St Joseph's with outcomes for a large number of adults nationally. In any case, destination breakdowns for the non-formal sector are not available despite the low numbers involved. There is a need to collate such figures from the records of the various centres involved.

Impacts on Centre

The introduction of a new national course at a high level has had a significant impact on the Centre. These can be outlined as follows:

- Cultural – the course has raised the bar for everyone by introducing new levels of application and creating role models within the centre
- Flexibility – the staff faced considerable challenges in timetabling and using the existing accommodation. In adapting the programme to the needs of the Centre and its Learners, the staff has had to adopt a 'whatever it takes, we'll get it done attitude'. These efforts have been rewarded through the efforts of the Learners and the initial set of results
- Reputation and public image – the results and the work placement performance of Learners has greatly enhanced the reputation of the Centre in the eyes of many key audiences e.g. other educators, partner organisations, employers, general public through their reading of local media. Most importantly, it has bolstered the reputation of the Centre as a provider of a credible and caring education amongst the Learners, their extended families and their wider community.
- Future demand – one of the impacts on the Centre is undoubtedly that the success of the first intake has positively influenced subsequent demand. For the September 2006 intake, there were 40 applicants. 17 eligible candidates were accepted and have started the programme.

Work Placements

During the first year, these gave rise to much negativity from Learners. There were difficulties in setting up placements and often, Learners felt that they should be paid for workplace activity rather than see it as preparatory or educational.

In the first year, almost half of the Learners needed assistance to access a placement. Almost all achieved this independently in year 2. Locations included a carpet shop, municipal dog pound, flower shop, motor repairs, building supplies and a charity shop.

All employers interviewed expressed satisfaction with the placements and agreed that the candidates were well prepared and performed their duties well.

Some suggestions included:

- Intense blocs are not suitable to many organisations – one morning per week over a year may suit better
- Clearer guidelines are needed for employers to inform what the Learner is expected to achieve and how the Centre believes the trainee can get most benefit from the placement

Learning

Some of the key learning relates to the entry and exit mechanisms for Learners i.e.

- There is a need to raise the bar in the application process in order to avoid early drop-outs or putting too much pressure on Learners in the first term. This would also lessen the one-to-one supports needed
- This suggests the possible need/demand for an LCA qualifier depending on the profile of future applicants or an assessment of those for whom the LCA might potentially suit.
- There is certainly a need for a pre-work course such as a BTEI module focussing on job-readiness. Learners express nervousness about on-the-job training and fear of failure away from the Centre environment. Learners take a risk in opting for LCA, as they have no route back into other courses in the Centre. This produces apprehensiveness, and even fear, about the future. If progression paths to employment are not clear-cut for this first group of graduates, there may be a need to create other progression routes through further study or work preparation either within the Centre or supported by the Centre. Such an option would need to be designed in a way that does not provide permanent shelter from a regular work environment.

Changes Planned

As a result of the experience of the first intake, a number of changes are already proposed for the second intake that will start the LCA in September 2006. These include

- More detailed assessment and interview process for candidate selection.
- An induction week was held in June 2006 for the 17 enrolled participants.
- More emphasis is being placed on work experience. Learners will be given greater freedom and responsibility to get their own placements.
- There will be more team meetings. However, scheduling these meetings remains a problem.

- There will be one subject change: science will replace religious education and is being included in order to assist women Learners to get more out of the Health & Beauty module.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

For Centre staff, the decision to offer the LCA has proven extremely worthwhile. For most of the Learners, their achievements have surpassed their expectations. In considering the measurable aspects of the programme and the recording of the process, it is worth remembering that there are real-life personal development stories over the two years of the programme that demonstrate real personal achievement and development. The struggle for individuals, especially in the early months, and the joy of results day provide images of the human journey that cannot be recorded here. Nonetheless, they also testify powerfully to what has been achieved. For staff, too, there has been a journey and a real sense of achievement based on meeting new challenges and adapting to the needs of Learners embarking on a new programme at a higher level to others on offer in the Centre.

The challenges and constraints of running a programme designed for 16 – 18 year olds in mainstream school settings in an STTC are considerable – timetabling, attendance requirements, supporting those who are new to such education rather than having just graduated from Junior Cert, accommodation, disposition of learners and staffing requirements are all challenges. These challenges are being met with considerable success.

Academic results and attainment levels are extremely high and set new standards for the centre as a whole. It is no exaggeration to say that, for the majority of the Learners, they have achieved beyond their own expectations. The LCA is also having a positive effect on teaching and learning across the entire range of provision in the Centre.

Learners have achieved a national educational standard and the success of the programme can be assessed within the context of the promotion of lifelong learning as well as labour market preparation. It should be recognised that there are multiple obstacles to achieving job-readiness, many of which are outside the scope of the LCA and the Centre.

Workplace linkage needs improvement but outcomes in relation to labour market activity cannot be effectively assessed yet until graduates have spent some time looking for employment. Given the apprehensions of emerging graduates and the lack of a route back into the centre, it is recommended that consideration be given to the provision of a pre-employment course or module. The availability of progression routes/options other than getting a job, such as a BTEI style course, should be explored.

Clearer guidelines are necessary for employers who offer work placements. These should demonstrate to the employer how they could maximise the experience for the trainee. Work placement timescales (regular versus bloc) should also be reviewed.

As the Centre is an unusual location for a programme that has been developed nationally and is usually offered to 16 –18 year olds in school settings, it is recommended that the Centre develop a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the course. This would legitimise and offer rationale for local aims, practices or methodologies that have been developed due to the uniqueness of the learners and the learning setting. For instance, some Learners are not motivated by the prospect of a job - children's' education, family, self-development may be more important. In this, they are different to LCA students in other (school) settings. If this is considered legitimate and desirable, it is recommended that it be clearly stated in the aims and objectives of the LCA in St. Joseph's

The impact of welfare and training allowances on labour market participation needs review at national level but it cannot be ignored in the context of the average pay levels for those with LCA as their highest level of qualification. Leaving aside the training allowance, the general availability of welfare payments for eighteen year olds nationally has a disproportionate effect on the educational participation rates of young people from disadvantaged groups

Disparity between older and younger Learners has implications for the pace of learning in the Centre. The younger ones tend to have higher literacy levels whereas adult learners have shown better portfolio preparation and all round application. This disparity has caused for difficulties that need to be reviewed. There is a need to be clearer about the standard of literacy needed to enter the course although this is being addressed through selection and induction procedures for the second intake.

In 2004, 26 Traveller pupils transferred from primary to post-primary in Ennis. Although this figure dropped to 16 in 2005, it has been averaging over 20 in the past few years. The current challenge is to support these pupils to stay and achieve in mainstream second level schools. To assist this aim, it is recommended that the LCA should not be offered in St. Joseph's to those under 18 years as such students should be encouraged to participate in integrated provision in schools or Youthreach. Whilst this is the preferred scenario, it is recognised that Learners sometimes find their way to STTCs as a result of breakdown in the mainstream school system. In such cases, St. Joseph's operate managed entry process in conjunction with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers.

There are significant implications for the Centre and its delivery of LCA in the recommendation of the Traveller Education Strategy that segregated provision be phased out. The associated review of STTCs will provide more information on future policy.

Subject to resources, the programme should explore the potential to assist Learners to apply and integrate new learning into their lives outside the Centre e.g. through a scheme of home computer ownership etc, family-learning modules etc.

In conclusion, the first-time delivery of the Leaving Cert Applied in St. Joseph's has been highly successful in terms of educational, personal and vocational impacts for the Learners and impacts on the Centre as a whole. It has created local role models and also pointed the way for successful methodologies to assist future Learners to achieve higher academic standards that can benefit them in personal and family learning as well as providing skills and qualifications recognised as part of the entry requirements to the labour market.

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