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PARTNERSHIPS  
working together - a partnership approach to NVQs





## The NVQ Link Programme

### The partnership

Limavady High School and St. Mary's School enjoy a close relationship that goes beyond their physical location to each other, side by side in Limavady town. This has expanded to include Limavady College of Further Education, which has provided sampling experiences across a range of vocational areas for the Year 11 and 12 pupils over the last twelve years. However these link experiences were not formally recognised and pupils still had to follow the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum.

The programme for pupils to gain NVQs came about for a variety of reasons. The schools were keen to develop work-related learning and make it more meaningful both to sampling programmes and workplacement experiences. It was important for pupils to *'engage in practical activities,'* that these be formally recognised and relate to the world of work.

In September 1999 fifty-four Year 11 pupils across both schools were identified to participate in a 2

year programme which would take them up to the end of their compulsory school career in June 2001.

### The programme

The partnership's guiding principles for the programme were that the schools expected the college to provide the training and assessment provision relating to the NVQ and the college expected the schools to maintain and support it in this delivery.

The initial starting point was to look at the key vocational areas that pupils would consider once they left school at 16. These included painting and decorating, joinery, motor vehicle, catering and hairdressing. The college would provide a range of programmes that enabled pupils to experience these vocational areas at NVQ level 1 and the expectation was that pupils would be able to achieve approximately 70% of an NVQ at level 1 over the 2 year period. Integral to this arrangement was the grouping of pupils from both schools in the same vocational programme.

The partnership knew that it was very important to establish a common understanding of this programme and central to this was the need to secure the confidence and commitment of the pupils and their parents.

To this end the schools commenced on an information drive that included:

- An information leaflet outlining The NVQ Link Programme.
- A parents' meeting at which a representative from Limavady College of Further Education outlined the proposed arrangements for parents and pupils.

Pupils were not able to sample vocational areas, as had been the case with the previous sampling programmes, and by the end of Year 10 had to choose one vocational area. Finding the workplacements was the responsibility of the schools and pupils were encouraged to try and organise appropriate workplacements themselves that

needed to be related to their chosen vocational area. The college and the schools also attempted to identify suitable placements.

Pupils commenced their Year 11 spending 3 days in school, 1 day in the college and 1 day in workplacement each week. The college staff would deliver the underpinning knowledge requirements of the NVQ. These college staff are approved by NVQ awarding bodies as being occupationally expert in their field. The 1 day per week spent in workplacement enabled the pupils to put their vocational learning into practice and be assessed in the workplace by the college staff.

Pupils had an induction period in the college at the beginning of the programme. This not only had the benefit of introducing the pupils to the new learning arrangements which had been agreed but also provided, for the first time, the opportunity for the pupils from both schools to mix together and become familiar with their new learning groups in each vocational programme.

Towards the end of the programme the 1 day a week in college was replaced by a second day in the workplacement. This helped the college to ensure the NVQ assessments were completed.

### On-going review

As well as giving time to the planning and preparation for this programme all parties knew that time and commitment was needed to make sure it remained a success.

The schools and college each designated staff to co-ordinate, monitor and review the link programme. Joint liaison and training activities occurred and they were found to be extremely useful in bringing the different teaching groups together to gain a better understanding of their respective positions. It also afforded the opportunity to begin the process of trying to match the experience of teaching in school to the particular needs of the vocational context, especially for key skills. This review process remains on going and has contributed to the new developments for the programme. As a result a number of learning points have been incorporated into programmes for future Year 11 pupils.

### The partners' experiences

Both Limavady High and St. Mary's are keen to point out that the advantages of the programme for the pupils and the schools heavily outweigh any problems experienced.

*'The link programme has really added to the pupils' school experience in their last 2 years.'*

From a position of some pupils only achieving a few low grade GCSEs with no other alternative provision, 54 pupils for the September 1999 – June 2001 cohort, were registered for their NVQ in addition to a number of GCSEs. Of these 36 achieved at least 1 unit of a level 1 qualification and 128 level 1 units were certificated. The schools have noted

significant improvements in pupil confidence for what was traditionally a low achieving and low attaining group and have witnessed an accelerated development of pupils' social skills and an increased sense of responsibility.

Finally for the schools themselves this provided the opportunity:

*'to enhance and value the role of vocational education and training as part of a broader learning package for all pupils.'*

### Future developments

The schools wish to improve on the success of this partnership and in addition to building on the programme's accomplishments, they also intend to develop it further. In particular three specific areas have been identified:

- To extend the vocational areas available for all pupils.
- To concentrate on the vocational provision for female pupils and extend this beyond traditional vocational areas.
- To develop vocational contexts to teaching in the schools for the purpose of matching the pupils' experiences in the link programme.

And finally, with the recently published Burns Report and the proposition of a collegiate system, Limavady High, St. Mary's and Limavady College collectively feel they are in a strong position to meet any new demands.