



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission**

LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME 2015

LINK MODULES

**CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT
COMMON LEVEL**

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LINK MODULES 2015

1. Introduction

1.1 Programme and Syllabus Structure

The two year Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) was introduced by the Department of Education in 1987 to promote the development of enterprise, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and vocational skills at senior cycle.

It is confined to students who are taking particular combinations of established Leaving Certificate subjects. These are known as Vocational Subject Groupings (VSGs). Students, in participating schools, can take this additional programme, to be taught and assessed separately and differently from their established Leaving Certificate subjects.

As outlined in the Programme Statement for LCVP, there are two Link Modules which are designed to be combined flexibly with each other. The Links Modules consists of compulsory work preparation/experience and enterprise activity together with personal vocational exploration and substantial use of information technology. They should be implemented in close integration with the vocational subjects.

The LCVP was reviewed in 2001 and the revised Link Modules were first examined in 2004. Assessment Guidelines were published in 2002 to assist teachers and LCVP co-ordinators. This publication, which is available at www.pdst.ie, is used by the Professional Development Service for Teachers in providing in-career seminars for teachers of LCVP. The State Examinations Commission issues a circular each January, to inform and help schools prepare candidates for the assessment of the Link Modules. It is available at www.examinations.ie/schools.

Note: This report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers, the published marking schemes and the Programme Statement. The examination papers and marking schemes are available on the State Examination Commission's website www.examinations.ie and the Programme Statement is available at www.curriculumonline.ie.

1.2 Assessment Specification

The examination, which is offered at Common level, comprises two components:

1. A Written Examination (40%)
2. A Portfolio of Coursework (60%)

The **Written Examination**, which is marked out of a total of 160 marks, is taken by candidates in May of the second year of the Leaving Certificate programme.

The examination, which is of two and a half hours duration, has three sections as follows:

- Section A (30 marks): A DVD sequence profiling a business or community enterprise or organisation. The six minute DVD is shown to candidates at the start of the examination. Candidates are required to answer eight questions based on the DVD sequence.
- Section B (30 marks): A case study covering topics such as a profile of an entrepreneur; a business/community/voluntary organisation; an overview of a local area; a social or economic issue. The case study is sent to participating schools (499 schools in 2015) one month before the date of the Written Examination. Candidates are required to answer three questions based on the case study.
- Section C (100 marks): There are six multi-part general questions covering the full range of the Programme Statement. Each question is worth 25 marks. Candidates are required to answer four questions.

The **Portfolio of Coursework**, which is prepared mainly during class time over the two years of the programme, carries a maximum of 240 marks and consists of two sections as follows:

Section 1: Core Items (compulsory)

- Curriculum Vitae (25 marks)
- Enterprise/Action Plan (35 marks)
- Career Investigation (40 marks)
- Summary Report (40 marks)

Section 2: Optional Items (any two from four)

- Diary of Work Experience (50 marks)
- Enterprise Report (50 marks)
- Recorded Interview/Presentation (50 marks)
- Report on 'My Own Place' (50 marks).

Both the Portfolio of Coursework and the Written Examination are assessed and marked by external examiners appointed and trained by the State Examinations Commission.

Grades are awarded to candidates as shown in **Table 1**.

Marks	Grade
320 – 400	Distinction (≥ 80 to 100%)
260 – 319	Merit (≥ 65 and $< 80\%$)
200 – 259	Pass (≥ 50 and $< 65\%$)
0 – 199	Ungraded ($< 50\%$)

Table 1: Grading system, Link Modules

For CAO purposes, both the Universities and the Institutes of Technology recognise LCVP as a subject. For all University and Institute of Technology CAO points purposes, the Link Modules results can be substituted for a candidate's 6th subject in the Leaving Certificate. A Distinction in the Link Modules is allocated 70 CAO points, equivalent to a C1 in a Leaving Certificate (Established) subject at Higher Level. A Merit is awarded 50 points and a Pass 30 points.

1.3 Participation Trends

Table 2 below shows the candidature for the Link Modules for the years 2011 to 2015.

Year	Link Modules	Total Leaving Certificate Candidature*	Link Modules as % of total
2011	16386	54341	30.2
2012	15848	52589	30.1
2013	15684	52767	29.7
2014	15276	54025	28.3
2015	14924	55045	27.1

*Total Leaving Certificate candidature excludes Leaving Certificate Applied candidates.

Table 2: Participation in the Link Modules, 2011 – 2015

Table 3 gives the gender composition of the Link Modules cohort for the last five years.

Year	Total Candidature	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as% of total	Male as % of total
2011	16386	8665	7721	52.9	47.1
2012	15848	8451	7397	53.3	46.7
2013	15684	8447	7237	53.9	46.1
2014	15276	8207	7069	53.7	46.3
2015	14924	8221	6721	55.1	45.9

Table 3: Gender composition of the Link Modules cohort, 2011 – 2015

Overall there has been a steady decrease in the number of Leaving Certificate students taking the Link Modules between 2011 and 2015. However, it is also clear from the data that the percentage of male candidates is declining more rapidly than female candidates and consequently that the male/female balance of the cohort has shifted significantly as a result.

2. Performance of Candidates

The grade distribution awarded over the last five years is given in **Table 4**.

Year	Total	Dist.	Merit	Pass	Ungraded
2011	16386	11.7	47.3	31.4	9.6
2012	15848	12.4	51.4	28.7	7.4
2013	15684	10.9	48.5	32.6	7.9
2014	15276	11.5	49.5	31.1	7.9
2015	14924	10.8	55.8	27.8	5.6

Table 4: Percentage of candidates awarded each grade in the Link Modules, 2011 – 2015

The distribution of grades by gender over the last five years is given in **Tables 5 and 6**.

Year	Total	Dist.	Merit	Pass	Ungraded
2011	16386	17.2	52.5	24.4	5.8
2012	15848	17.1	55.6	22.8	4.5
2013	15684	15.4	53.9	26.3	4.3
2014	15276	17.0	55.3	23.4	4.3
2015	14924	15.2	61.0	20.7	3.2

Table 5: Percentage of female candidates awarded each grade in the Link Modules, 2011 – 2015

Year	Total	Dist.	Merit	Pass	Ungraded
2011	16386	5.5	41.3	39.3	13.9
2012	15848	7.1	46.7	35.5	10.6
2013	15684	5.6	42.4	40.0	12.1
2014	15276	5.1	42.7	40.1	12.1
2015	14924	6.0	49.2	36.3	8.5

Table 6: Percentage of male candidates awarded each grade in the Link Modules, 2011 - 2015

These results show that female candidates have consistently outperformed male candidates over the last five years at both the distinction and merit grades. The

ungraded rate for female candidates is consistently lower than for male candidates over the same time period.

3. Analysis of Candidate Performance

3.1 Portfolio of Coursework

In the case of the Portfolio of Coursework, candidates achieve the specific learning outcomes by engaging in classroom, school and community based activities through which they learn skills such as planning, organisation, presentation, problem solving and teamwork. They concurrently evaluate and document their experiences and submit these documents for assessment. Each portfolio item must be the candidate's own original work. The Assessment Guidelines (page 22) state that 'Portfolio work should be undertaken mainly during class time under the supervision of the teacher.' The inclusion of material directly downloaded from websites or copied from other sources is not permitted. There is an exception for the Career Investigation as downloaded material may be used when dealing with information regarding further education and related entry requirements. This is because such information is of a specific, semi-legal and technical nature and not amenable to personal adaptation.

The information in **Table 7** is based on an analysis of the Sample 20 returns (10.5% of cohort). The attempt frequency, average marks and average percentage marks are summarised below.

Topic	Attempt Frequency %	Average Mark and %
	Core Items	
Curriculum Vitae (25 marks)	100	21 (84)
Action Plan (35 marks)	99	27 (77)
Career Investigation (40 marks)	99	30 (75)
Summary Report (40 marks)	98	31 (78)
	Optional Items	
Work Experience Diary (50 marks)	92	33 (66)
Enterprise Report (50 marks)	8	38 (76)
My Own Place (50 marks)	10	35 (70)
Recorded Interview (50 marks)	89	39 (78)

Table 7: Popularity, average mark and percentage achieved for each portfolio item, Link Modules 2015

Reports from examiner identified some issues, common to all portfolio items, which affect candidate performance. Attention is drawn to the fact that each of the portfolio items presented can earn significant marks for word processing, presentation, layout, spelling and grammar. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that all documents are well presented and follow the Assessment Guidelines.

It was also noted that, in respect of activities which are carried out as a group, candidates' personal aims or objectives were not always stated thus making it impossible to identify each individual's contribution. Furthermore, where portfolio items required conclusions or recommendations these were not always stated or when they were they were not linked back to the aims and objectives stated in the earlier part of the document. In general, a wide range of activities is central to the successful implementation of the LCVP and this was not reflected in the scope of portfolio items submitted. The specific learning outcomes for each of the Link Modules clearly state what students are expected to achieve as they participate in activities. All activities are predicated on achieving the specific learning outcomes. Failure to do so can lead to submitted portfolio items based on these activities being disallowed with the consequent loss of marks.

The number of suspected plagiarism cases has been steadily declining from sixty cases in 2011 to thirty one cases in 2015. This is a very welcome development.

One of the main difficulties in the Enterprise/Action plan as stated in examiners' reports was the use of tenses. Research methods may be in the past or future tense. Analysis of research must be in the past tense and the remainder of the plan must be in the future tense. Candidates need to demonstrate how any costs will be covered as well as stating any profit earned. At least two methods of research must be provided. Candidates should avoid repeating the same type of research method.

The Career Investigation is an outcome of Unit 3 of the Link Module, Preparation for the World of Work. It provides an opportunity to investigate a career which suits aptitudes, interests and the subject choices for the Leaving Certificate. It is an investigation of a career and not a course. In 2015, many candidates gave too much technical detail from websites about possible courses rather than focusing on the career emanating from the course. The investigation must show clear evidence of interaction with adults other than teachers. One area of significant weakness in the Career Investigations submitted was the evaluation of both the career and the investigation. Candidates provided reasonable evaluations of the investigations but omitted an evaluation of the career in many cases.

The purpose of the Summary Report is to present information in a concise and logical way that is easy to read. The name of the activity must be stated as part of the report. Examiners noted that candidates often gave too much emphasis to the preparation of the activity and provided very brief accounts of the activity resulting in loss of marks.

The Work Experience Diary is the most popular of the optional portfolio items (92%). It is an outcome of Unit 4 of the Link Module, Preparation for the World of Work. A skill which needs improvement in this portfolio item is the ability of candidates to analyse personal performance during the work experience. The analysis provided in many Work Experience Diaries was too brief and lacked depth. Candidates need to evaluate work experience in light of vocational aspirations. It is also important to make reference to how learning from work experience can be applied at home, in school and in the community. The Assessment Guidelines (page 70) state that 'Students are

encouraged to plan and organise a placement in an adult working environment'. Work shadowing is also permitted in this environment but work shadowing a student on a college course does not meet the assessment requirements. The dates of all Work Experience Diaries must be within the two year time frame of the LCVP. Incorrect dates and omission of dates resulted in loss of marks.

The Enterprise Report was the least popular optional portfolio item submitted by just 8% of candidates. Those who submitted an Enterprise Report performed well scoring on average 76%. This report must be based on a group activity. The Assessment Guidelines (page 93) state that 'this should be the student's unique record of a group/class project or enterprise'. Each candidate must document their individual contribution to the activity. In 2015 many lower scoring candidates failed to identify their own contributions to group activities.

My Own Place continues to have a low uptake by candidates with just 10% opting to do this portfolio item. The report must contain an analysis of a local issue. Most candidates provided a very good description of their local area but failed to provide detail regarding an investigation of an issue relevant to their local area. My Own Place investigations must take place in the candidate's local area and reports on locations outside Ireland do not meet the assessment criteria.

3.2 Written Examination

The information in the **Table 8** is based on an analysis of scripts from 10.5% of the cohort. The attempt frequency, average marks and average percentage marks for each question are summarised therein.

Question	Attempt Frequency	Average mark and %	Topic
Section A (30 marks)			Audio Visual
Q.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8	100	19 (63)	DVD based on an enterprise
Section B (30 marks)			Case Study
Q.1, 2 and 3	100	13 (43)	Corporate Social Responsibility and Recruitment
Section C (100 marks)			General Questions
Q.1 (25 marks)	81	13 (52)	Planning an Activity
Q.2 (25 marks)	73	12 (48)	Voluntary Bodies
Q.3 (25 marks)	87	15 (60)	Work Experience
Q.4 (25 marks)	34	13 (52)	Employers and Employees
Q.5 (25 marks)	87	15 (60)	Career Investigation
Q.6 (25 marks)	38	11 (44)	Enterprise Activity

Table 8: Popularity of and average mark for each question, Written Examination, Link Modules

Analysis of Candidate Performance

The 2015 Written Examination covered a wide range of specific learning outcomes and of an appropriate standard. The most common causes of candidates losing marks related to not reading the questions correctly (or misinterpreting the requirements), not giving the required number of points, repeating points and failure to develop answers. A significant number of candidates had difficulties with the higher order demand of evaluation.

Section A (audio visual) scored an average of 19 marks which was slightly lower than previous years. The specific learning outcomes in Link Module II, Enterprise Education, were assessed in this Section. As in previous years the candidates scored reasonably well in Questions 1 – 6. However, Questions 7 and 8 proved challenging for many candidates. The specific learning outcome 2.2 in Link Module II states ‘students must understand how an enterprise starts up and what support/training is available.’ Mentoring of entrepreneurs by Local Enterprise Offices (LEO’s), as asked in Question

8, is an example of one of these supports but was unfamiliar to many candidates which resulted in loss of marks.

The average mark for Section B (case study) was 13 marks which was lower than previous years. The case study was issued to schools one month before the Written Examination. It was based around specific learning outcomes from both Link Modules I and II. In Question 1, candidates were asked to explain three terms used in the case study. Some provided an explanation of shareholders instead of stakeholders. In Question 3 diversification was confused with diversity.

In Section C, Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 proved very popular. Questions 3 and 5 were the most popular and attracted the highest marks. This was due to the fact that candidates successfully applied learning from the preparation of portfolio items to answering these questions.

In Question 1 (d), candidates were provided with an opportunity to describe three evaluation methods used in an LCVP activity. Evaluation is a very important skill in the Link Modules and is a specific learning outcome in six of eight units. A majority of candidates simply mentioned the evaluation methods used but did not develop answers sufficiently. Candidate answers must address the question cues used in the question. Cues such as ‘describe’ must be responded to appropriately if candidates are to achieve maximum marks.

Part of Link Module I, Preparation for the World of Work, is an application to a potential employer seeking work experience. This can be by letter, telephone and email as stated in Unit 2, Job Seeking Skills. Question 3 (b) required candidates to write a letter requesting a work placement. Many candidates were not familiar with the layout required for a letter of application. Three important items were omitted from a significant number of letters: the employer’s title, the dates of the work experience and the fact that a CV had been enclosed. Candidates lost marks accordingly.

In seven of the eight units in both Link Modules, the specific learning outcomes state that all activities should be linked to learning in relevant Leaving Certificate subjects. Question 5 (c) provided an opportunity to list two subjects and to explain their

relevance in a career choice. A small number of candidates referred to subjects which were not Leaving Certificate subjects such as Business Studies, Computers, Guidance and PE. In many cases an explanation of the relevance of the Leaving Certificate subjects to the career choice was omitted.

While candidates are afforded an opportunity to use ICT in the preparation of portfolio items it is also necessary to be able to describe and evaluate the use of ICT in the development of a business enterprise (specific learning outcome 2.12, Unit 2). In Question 6 (d) candidates were asked to do this. Many showed a limited knowledge of ICT. Answers given were vague and too general. There was no reference to specific elements of ICT such as word processing and spreadsheets.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Portfolio of Coursework

The following are the main conclusions derived from examiners' reports and from the analysis of candidate performance.

- The Portfolio of Coursework was generally well completed and of a much higher standard than the Written Examination.
- The number of suspected plagiarism cases has been steadily declining from sixty cases in 2011 to thirty one cases in 2015. This is a very welcome development.
- A wide range of activities was evident in the Portfolio of Coursework.
- Candidates lost marks in the Portfolio of Coursework for the following reasons:
 - portfolio items were too short or not fully completed
 - there were presentation and layout errors
 - in the case of the Career Investigation, many gave too much technical detail from websites about possible courses rather than focusing on the career emanating from the course
 - in the case of the Work Experience Diary, the analysis frequently did not focus sufficiently on candidate's own personal performance during the work experience or refer to their vocational aspirations, and was often too brief and lacking in depth.

- evaluations generally were not linked back to the stated aims and objectives – evaluations were a particular area of weakness in the Career Investigations
- individual contributions were omitted from group projects
- in the case of My Own Place, most candidates provided a very good description of their local area but failed to provide detail regarding an investigation of an issue relevant to their local area.
- the inclusion of non-LCVP activities.

4.2 Written Examination

- A significant number of candidates had difficulties with the higher order demand of evaluation
- Many candidates demonstrated competence in applying learning from the preparation of portfolio items in answering questions in Section C of the paper and achieved high marks
- Candidates lost marks in the Written Examination for the following reasons:
 - not reading questions carefully or interpreting questions incorrectly
 - not responding adequately to the command words used in questions e.g. describe, list, outline and explain
 - not being familiar with the layout and requirements of the letter of application
 - failure to support answering with the correct amount of detail or development
 - providing insufficient analysis and evaluation where required.

5. Recommendations to Teachers and Students

5.1 Portfolio of Coursework

It is recommended that Teachers:

- Obtain and read the circular issued by the State Examinations Commission to schools in January each year called ‘Assessment Arrangements’. A copy of this circular can be downloaded from the website www.examinations.ie/schools.
- Ensure that students adhere to the Assessment Guidelines (page 21) which state that ‘No more than **six items** should be presented in the portfolio - **one** item from each of the core areas and **one** item from each chosen option’. Producing multiple copies of portfolio items takes up a significant amount of class time and may have a negative impact on the quality of portfolio items submitted and ultimately on the time available to prepare for the Written Examination.
- Try to schedule activities as early as possible as this allows time for students to review and proofread portfolio items before submission.
- Appoint a person to conduct the Recorded Interviews who is familiar with students and can make them comfortable. Ensure that the person selected is familiar with the Assessment Guidelines (page 120) regarding the conduct of the interview. Questions asked should be open ended and provide students with an opportunity to give full and detailed answers. The interviewer should ensure that questions make reference to the LCVP.
- Make four copies of the DVD of the Recorded Interview. Submit two copies to the State Examinations Commission with the Portfolio of Coursework and retain the remaining two copies in the school. Ensure that the DVD is finalised correctly and capable of being played on a domestic DVD player. DVD-R is the most compatible format when burning DVDs. Avoid using DVD RW. Write the school roll number on each DVD.
- When filming the DVD of the Recorded Interview ensure:
 - candidates’ examination numbers are visible during the recording
 - filming does not take place during lunch or break time as there may be a lot of background noise.
- Sequence sheets should reflect the running order of the candidates and be included with the DVD.

It is recommended that students:

- Refer to the Programme Statement available at www.curriculumonline.ie which gives the specific learning outcomes for each unit within the Link Modules. The specific learning outcomes should be referred to on a regular basis to ensure that all work prepared and presented is part of the LCVP.
- Follow the guidance of teachers and review portfolios on a regular basis. Students should be aware that significant marks are available for presentation across the entire Portfolio of Coursework.
- Prepare well for the Recorded Interview. Develop answers without prompting from the interviewer. Answers should be presented naturally and confidently.

5.2 Written Examination

It is recommended that teachers:

- Provide students with an opportunity to practise for the Written Examination, using past examination papers.
- Ensure that all students are given a copy of the case study as soon as it arrives in the school. Read through the case study in detail with students. Provide an explanation of key terms and phrases used in the case study.
- Familiarise students with the requirements of the command words used in the examination paper.
- Use published marking schemes as a resource and a guide when preparing for the Written Examination. These are available at the State Examinations Commission's website www.examinations.ie.

It is recommended that students:

- Read all questions carefully and answer all the required parts.
- Take a critical look at each answer before leaving it to ensure that all relevant details are included.
- Take account of mark allocations for questions and parts of questions and plan the use of time accordingly.
- Use the learning gained through the completion of the Portfolio of Coursework when answering the relevant questions in the Written Examination.

- Use past examination papers and marking schemes to prepare for the Written Examination. These are available at the State Examinations Commission's website www.examinations.ie.