

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

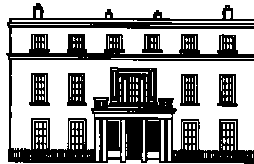
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Transition Year Programme Evaluation  
REPORT**

**Gonzaga College,  
Sandford Road, Ranelagh, Dublin 6.**

**Roll Number: 60530S**

**Date of inspection: 13 April 2011**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

## **EVALUATION OF THE TRANSITION YEAR PROGRAMME**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report has been written following an evaluation of the Transition Year (TY) programme in Gonzaga College, Dublin. It presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for the further development of the programme in the college. During the evaluation, the inspector held meetings with the school principal and deputy principal, the co-ordinator, a core group of teachers and with a small group of students. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector liaised with the programme co-ordinator and visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning. The inspector provided oral feedback to teachers on lessons observed. The inspector also examined students' work and reviewed relevant documentation pertaining to the programme, as well as teachers' written preparation. The outcomes of the evaluation were discussed with the school principal, deputy principal and the programme co-ordinator at the end of the evaluation period.

The mission of Gonzaga College is articulated through many aspects of the TY programme. Each student is afforded the opportunity to develop their unique talents and skills. Students are encouraged to make a commitment of service to others through various elements of the TY programme. There are currently four class groups, each of approximately 22 students, following the programme. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

### **1 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME ORGANISATION**

#### **1.1 Whole school support**

Communication with the whole school community is very good. The majority of staff is involved in teaching the programme. Morale among the teaching team is high. Students and staff are kept fully informed regarding the TY programme in many ways. Information is disseminated to students and staff through the dedicated TY notice boards. TY events, activities, and student successes are highlighted on the well-designed school website. Senior management plays a vital role in supporting and displaying effective leadership regarding the programme and its implementation. To further support TY in the college, it is recommended that TY be placed on the agenda of staff meetings and the co-ordinator be provided with the opportunity to address the whole staff on issues relating to TY. In this way, staff can also contribute to the effective planning and review of the programme.

It is praiseworthy that student achievement in TY is affirmed and celebrated by the school community. Upon completion of TY, a dedicated TY exhibition and awards event is organised. This important event includes a formal presentation of TY certificates and also affords students with the opportunity to display samples of the work they have completed throughout the year.

#### **1.2 Resources**

Staff are effectively deployed to teach the programme and teachers' skills are well utilised in designing, implementing and teaching the TY programme. The timetable is well structured with the academic year divided into four discrete blocks of time. The various elements of the programme are appropriately timetabled.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is effectively utilised in both organising and implementing the programme. Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to engage in appropriate continuing professional development (CPD). It is recommended that whole staff in-service in assessment for learning be organised with appropriate focus on its implementation in TY.

### **1.3 Student selection and support**

Students and parents are given accurate and appropriate information regarding the TY programme. Parents of third-year students are invited to a TY programme information evening. The production of a well-designed and informative TY information brochure for parents and students in the current year is very good. The TY programme in Gonzaga College is a compulsory part of the school's six-year cycle. The school's admissions statement should be revised appropriately to indicate the nature and provision of TY in the college. Mixed-ability groups are formed in TY. This process ensures that decisions regarding subject levels are taken at the end of TY. Some parents decide to send their children on additional work placements or on international language exchange programmes. While these initiatives are beneficial, students are missing valuable in-school tuition in various excellent modules, subjects and activities. It is therefore recommended that school management, in collaboration with parents, makes decisions to ensure that each student achieves maximum benefit from the various aspects of the programme offered.

Guidance provision in TY is very good with weekly timetabled guidance provision. Each student is required to complete an extensive guidance project. It is praiseworthy that differential aptitude tests and student interest profiles are completed and discussed with the guidance counsellor. Students are guided through senior cycle subject options and are encouraged to reflect on and review all aspects of their TY experience. This is praiseworthy. Preparation for work experience and for the social outreach programme also forms part of guidance in TY. Students present and discuss their individual guidance project through a structured interview. This is very good practice. In light of the compulsory nature of TY, it is recommended that individual student evaluation within the TY programme be strengthened in an effort to ensure that supports for students with particular individual needs are maximised.

TY students with additional needs are well supported. Many modules and activities in TY are designed and structured to be accessible to all students. Good links have been developed with the learning support department and teachers are regularly informed regarding best practice in facilitation and integration of students with additional needs.

### **1.4 Home-school links**

Parents are supportive of the TY programme. Contact with parents is on-going throughout the year and documentation reviewed during the evaluation shows the good extent of this communication. Parents are well informed regarding subject choice for senior cycle. Parents are invited to the school events including the TY awards and presentation evening. The school website keeps parents informed of school activities, including TY activities. There is ongoing communication between home and school through the student journal. It is very praiseworthy that the student journal will be redesigned and customised specifically to TY from the next academic year. It is also very good that the TY co-ordinator and the chairperson of the school's parents' association meet to discuss TY issues.

Parents receive meaningful feedback on the educational progress of their child during TY. ICT is well utilised in this process as parents can access appropriate assessment information on the school's eportal system. Currently, the school does not host a TY parent-teacher meeting. To

augment the reporting on academic progress in TY and to gather further evaluative comments from parents on the programme, it is recommended that a parent-teacher meeting be convened at which the student would be present.

## **2 QUALITY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND CO-ORDINATION**

### **2.1 Planning**

The overall quality of planning for TY in the college is good. Delegation of duties to particular aspects of the TY programme is well organised by senior management. Together with overall TY co-ordination, members of staff are appointed to co-ordination of social outreach provision, student work placement and the Gaisce President's Award. This is very good practice. Formal core team meetings would help to support the work of the TY co-ordinator and senior management should consider this provision. The good practice of meetings between the TY co-ordinator and individual core team members already exists and minutes of meetings are maintained.

An appropriate current written plan is in place for the programme. However, many of the individual subject plans examined do not adhere to the subject plan template for TY as outlined in the Department guidelines on writing the TY programme. Many of these subject plans require some restructuring, development and review. Each subject department should meet to review its TY planning and should develop an appropriate subject plan using the common template outlined in the guidelines. A more cohesive approach to planning is required with self-evaluation, cross-curricular links and key skills built into each subject plan. Some subject departments may wish to develop their programme as a transition unit. Reference should be made to [www.ncca.ie/transitionunits](http://www.ncca.ie/transitionunits) where details of planning transition units may be accessed.

Students indicated a good level of satisfaction with the school's TY programme during the course of the evaluation. There is evidence that programme evaluation and review has had a positive effect on the planning and delivery of the TY programme. The school outlined some self-evaluation measures for TY which include comments gathered from students, teachers and parents. Students reflect on their social outreach and on their work placements and formally record their evaluation. This is very good practice. Employers evaluate students' performance in the workplace and share this with the school. Following recent internal review, programme changes were implemented including changes to core subject assessment, introduction of cooking skills and the optional activity afternoon.

### **2.2 Co-ordination**

Formal TY programme co-ordination structures are in place and are operating effectively. Communication with parents, senior management, teaching staff, students and the whole school community is very good. This is an effective support measure for students. There is good liaison between class tutors, year head and co-ordinator. TY co-ordination duties are extensive and are carried out very effectively. The specific duties pertaining to the planning, organisation and implementation of TY are carried out with commitment and purpose. The TY co-ordinator currently holds the post of programme co-ordinator as set out in Circular 17/02. In the current year, this post has not been granted the specific time allocation of three hours due to stated timetabling difficulties. It is recommended that senior management makes the appropriate time allocation to the post of programme co-ordinator in accordance with the above circular from the outset of the next academic year.

## **2.3 Curriculum**

The TY curriculum in Gonzaga College endeavours to enable students to enrich their learning experiences while preparing students for senior cycle and for their future role in society. The curriculum is broad and balanced in line with Department guidelines while offering a variety of subjects, modules and activities. Some core subjects offer continuity from junior cycle and some optional Leaving Certificate subjects are sampled. In addition, some new subjects specifically designed for TY are introduced including Astronomy, Microsoft Academy computer skills and Music Appreciation. Such subjects introduce TY students to different experiences outside the school curriculum. The division of the school year into four discrete blocks maximises students' curricular experiences throughout TY. This is very good as it fulfils key TY aims. Consideration should be given to provision of double periods for some practical subjects to help ensure that hands-on practical work can be appropriately implemented. To further broaden the curriculum, the college is considering introducing Horticulture to TY. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of Technology and Mini Company to TY. This would further broaden students' enterprise and technical skills.

The majority of subjects and modules are taken by all students. Active learning, group and team work have been successfully integrated into many key aspects of the TY programme. Activities outside the classroom are encouraged and supported by the college and these activities are a vital element of the TY programme. Confidence building is promoted through these activities. Other activities include: First Aid, Cookery, Water safety, Hockey and Rhetoric. An element of choice is built into Thursday afternoon activities whereby students can identify key skills they wish to develop. Modules include Photography, Archery, Sailing, Drama and Archaeology.

Social outreach provision is a particular strength of TY provision at Gonzaga College. Students are provided with opportunities to learn to be responsible and participative citizens and actively participate in their local community. Student involvement in the timetabled social outreach programme is very good as it promotes key aims of TY. Voluntary work is undertaken in community based projects. Students also engage in two weeks of social outreach and find placements in nursing homes, homeless shelters, work with charities and with the disabled. Students are involved in fund-raising activities throughout the year and work with various charities to this end. An Gaisce, the President's Award scheme is a compulsory element of TY at the college. Many key aspects of TY are fulfilled through development of personal skills and community involvement.

The college values the development of students' experiential learning. Students are well prepared for work experience with support from the work experience co-ordinator, the TY co-ordinator and senior management. Work experience is organised in two one-week blocks with students afforded the opportunity of finding their own placements. The school also participates in additional work placement programmes provided by the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI) and St Patrick's University Hospital.

## **3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **3.1 Planning and preparation**

Planning and preparation provides for differentiated approaches to teaching and learning in accordance with the range of students' abilities, needs and interests. The taught programme reflected, in the main, the school's plan for the programme. Teachers were well prepared for

lessons and the level of advance planning for lessons was good. A written yearly current plan was available for all subjects evaluated in the course of the inspection. Preparation for lessons included effective planning for use of resources including ICT. Lesson resources, such as worksheets and handouts, were ready in advance of lessons. The level of advance preparation led to effective delivery of lessons and supported the student learning experience.

### **3.2 Learning and teaching**

Lesson aims and objectives were clearly outlined to students at the outset of some lessons. This good practice should be extended. The structure of lessons was good and classroom management was effective. In many lessons, student seating arrangements helped to maximise student participation. The pace of the vast majority of lessons was appropriate to students' abilities and the task in hand. There was a clear focus on skills development and teachers demonstrated an awareness of TY aims while delivering classroom lessons. Teacher inputs were appropriately short, clear and concise. Relationships in the classroom were very good, and student learning was enhanced as a result. High expectations of teachers ensured that students were sufficiently challenged to maximise their potential.

A range of teaching methodologies, appropriate to the TY programme were used. Interest was heightened in some lessons where appropriate links were established with students' everyday experiences. Good use was made of teaching resources with exemplary use of video in one lesson whereby a video, paused at appropriate intervals was used as a catalyst to inspire lively discussion and debate on the theme of the lesson. Appropriate, short clear inputs by the teacher were a key feature of all lessons. The board was used effectively to highlight key ideas in many lessons. ICT was used as an aid to student learning in many lessons and its use should be extended as appropriate to other lessons. Students were afforded the opportunity to present their research in one lesson. This is very good as it develops important investigative and communication skills. The varied methodologies observed in lessons worked very well as a result of well-thought-out strategies.

The quality of students' understanding was reflected in their ability to ask and answer questions. Good use was made of a range of questioning strategies in lessons visited. Individual questions elicited specific responses, instilled a good level of challenge, while higher-order questions encouraged students to explain their reasoning.

Participation by students was very good in the vast majority of lessons. However, some students will require additional encouragement to fully participate. It is recommended that strategies to improve meaningful participation and inclusion of all students in lessons be implemented. For example, utilisation of group work, targeted questioning strategies and the assignment of short tasks to students may help to improve whole-class participation and interest in lessons. Best practice was observed where worksheets and other teaching aids were used to reinforce learning and to engage students as active learners. It is recommended that this practice be extended to other lessons.

A good affirmative atmosphere prevailed and relationships in the classroom were very good. Student learning was enhanced as a result. Teachers were knowledgeable in their subject areas and shared their expertise enthusiastically with students. Concepts were explained with clarity and most students demonstrated positive attitudes to learning. Most material chosen for the lessons was in line with TY guidelines. Students responded positively with good motivation and interest. Many subjects were taught in an innovative and interesting way in line with TY guidelines. This is highly commended.

### 3.3 Assessment

A range of assessment modes are regularly used and students' work is monitored on an ongoing basis. Formative assessment is a key feature of class work and project work. There are formal examinations in some core subjects with results of all assessments and teacher comments available to parents on the school eportal system. Future reports should be customised to reflect students' academic performance, effort in class, participation, attendance and punctuality. The new student journal will also strengthen school assessment strategies. This is very good as it provides accessible assessment information to parents. Continuous assessment is a key feature of the programme with students being assigned tasks for assessment in written, oral, aural, project and portfolio formats. Employers assess students' work experience and return an evaluative report to the school. Students receive homework assignments on a regular basis in the form of worksheets, project work and research assignments. The opportunity may present itself to introduce student self-assessment in advance of parent-teacher meetings.

To strengthen the assessment process, it is recommended that that an end-of-year portfolio assessment be introduced and that an interview with set criteria should form part of the assessment process. For example, students may be required to choose what they consider to be some of their best work for this interview. In addition, consideration should be given to students maintaining an electronic reflective portfolio of their ongoing experiences during TY.

## 4 SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Student achievement in TY is affirmed and celebrated by the school community.
- Teachers' skills are well utilised in designing and implementing the TY programme.
- TY co-ordination duties are extensive and are carried out very effectively.
- The TY curriculum offers a variety of subjects, modules and activities and is broad and balanced in line with Department guidelines. Social outreach provision is a particular strength of TY provision at Gonzaga College.
- A good affirmative atmosphere prevailed and relationships in the classroom were very good.
- There was a clear focus on skills development and teachers demonstrated an awareness of TY aims while delivering classroom lessons.
- Teachers were knowledgeable in their subject areas and shared their expertise enthusiastically with students.
- Parents receive meaningful feedback on the educational progress of their child during TY.

As a means of building on these strengths the following key recommendations are made:

- In relation to some parents' decisions to send their children on additional work placements or on international language exchange programmes, and the subsequent loss of valuable in-school tuition [time](#), school management, in collaboration with parents, should make decisions to ensure that each student receives maximum benefit from the various aspects of the programme offered.
- Many TY subject plans require restructuring, development and review.

- Senior management should make the appropriate time allocation to the post of programme co-ordinator in accordance with circular 17/02.
- It is recommended that an end-of-year portfolio assessment be introduced.

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