

## **What do Guidance Counsellors have to say about the REACH+ Programme? April 2015**

REACH+ is an excellent programme which helps students prepare for career and college life. All of our students set up a REACH+ account in Transition Year and save all their work and research on this account until the end of 6th year. This allows students to become actively involved in their search and also enables the Guidance Counsellor to see what each student has been researching. This saves a lot of time when a student comes for a one to one session.

If students have an iPad they are able to access their account at any time. I find the CAO app extremely useful. Students can highlight courses of interest, research these courses and then write 255 words about what they like/dislike about the course. Students can then content rate the course. This is very useful from an administrative point of view as it enables Guidance Counsellors to see what areas of study within each course they are interested in.

Also I find the Transition Year Work Experience section extremely useful. Students can register placements and keep their diary daily. Again if students have an iPad while on work placement they are more likely to write about their experiences while on placement by simply logging in and answering the prompt questions on the page.

I find the Guidance Website useful for storing presentations and information in one place. Parents can also log into this website should they require any information. Information regarding open days etc. are also posted daily. There are also lots of lesson plans available which can give great structure to classes.

***Áine Máire Ní Uaithne***

***Guidance Counsellor – Gael Choláiste Luimnigh - Limerick***

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Regarding the REACH+ Programme I think it is a great resource for Senior Careers. The students have the option of accessing a well- tailored structured programme on the web which also allows me as their teacher to access records and monitor their progress. The workbook is also a very important resource, giving students an opportunity to reflect, discuss issues and interact with each other.

Students enjoy completing tests and questionnaires such as the Interest Test as it appeals visually and uses simple language – which facilitates learning for students within a wide range of abilities. The follow-up exercises are very well linked with the test results which encourages students to do further research and develop the knowledge.

The CareersPortal site provides a wide range of up-to-date information and offers insights into careers from our own cultural perspective which engages students more easily as they recognise the relevance of their current studies, entry requirements and labour market information.

I have recommended the section on Subject Choice to parents and Third Year students as it is very useful. I often use the graphs you have on LC results which compared exam performance in each subject at Higher and Ordinary level.

Regarding the Values and Career Choices questionnaire - it certainly challenges senior students to reflect on their personal values and how they will impact on their prospective careers.

Finally the REACH<sup>+</sup> team are always very supportive should any technical difficulties arise, they always respond promptly, efficiently and with good humour.

***Geraldine McGee***

***Guidance Counsellor – Loreto Community School – Milford – Co Donegal***

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REACH<sup>+</sup> has been in operation in our school for the last four years.

We are a DEIS school and funding and finances can often be an issue. On presentation of this programme to Management, its' completeness, professionalism and accessibility for all was something that Management felt should be supported within the school.

We have never looked back and over 400 of our Senior Cycle students have made use of the extensive resources available within the programme. These resources have really facilitated a self-directed approach to career research and helped them to become more personally self-aware, responsible and motivated in making the best choices for their future.

As a Guidance Counsellor, I have found the ability to monitor student progress online invaluable, particularly when trying to identify those students who are possibly slipping behind or experiencing confusion or lack of motivation in making decisions regarding their future. Using REACH<sup>+</sup>, has allowed me identify these students early on in the process. Early intervention and support for students, who otherwise might go under the radar, is put in place and sees them supported and guided in fulfilling their potential both in school and for their future careers.

With large numbers of students having very diverse needs, currently in our Senior Cycle, REACH<sup>+</sup> has given me a very structured, well thought out Careers Programme with something for everyone and has ensured that I can target my one to one Guidance meetings to support the students with an even more individual and efficient approach.

***Aisling Barry***

***Guidance Counsellor - Salesian Secondary School – Limerick***

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I have been using REACH<sup>+</sup> for the past 4/5 years with all senior cycle students. Using REACH<sup>+</sup> has transformed the delivery of guidance in the classroom for me. Beginning with Transition Year students, the programme provides a great opportunity to introduce students to Career Interest Assessments, subject choice information, general career information and using the

CAO and PLC routes as entry into colleges. The website is very user friendly with information at your fingertips.

Apps like the Guidance Interview, Exam Targets and Self-Assessment are particularly useful when meeting with the students for individual guidance. The ease of access to student information helps to maximize the time spent with them. The guidance noticeboard with daily postings of upcoming events, college notices and career updates keep students abreast with information essential to the career process they are engaged with.

Students find the video library particularly useful with a wide range of videos available to them on topics such as options after school, study skills, CV builder, interview preparation, student finance and numerous videos on the different career sectors. Students can also upload documents to their own folder within the website.

The school's Career website embedded in the CareersPortal website is invaluable. Uploading documents for students to access, cuts down on endless photocopying. Being able to post our own events for the school with details of Open Days, or guest speakers to the classroom is very useful. Students know that these details are posted on the website so that puts an end to the old excuse "I was missing from class and didn't know it was happening"!

There is also the capacity to view student's activity on the website and to check what assignments they have completed. I use this at parent teacher meetings to show them the work their daughter has completed during careers class.

I cannot underestimate the benefits of using REACH+. As I said at the outset, using REACH+ has transformed the delivery of guidance in the classroom for me and I cannot imagine functioning as a guidance counsellor without it. I would highly recommend to anyone who is looking for an all in one guidance resource.

***Marjorie Aherne***

***Guidance Counsellor – Scoil Mhuire – Ennistymon – Co Clare***

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Since introducing the REACH+ programme 4 years ago, over 800 of our students are currently participating or have completed the programme. We immediately found that REACH+ positively impacted our guidance programme in a number of ways. Students were better prepared for 6th year and more engaged in their careers work throughout the programme. It also has allowed our guidance counsellors to work in a more effective and efficient way.

The programme offers structured and age appropriate activities for students to engage in. All activities are accompanied by opportunities for reflection and progress is easily tracked by Guidance Counsellors.

Students and parents are extremely enthusiastic about the programme. Students enjoy completing the work activities and engaging in the many online resources provided. Parents also value the programme and are encouraged to discuss the programme and their child's

progress and access the programme from home. Parents also find the 'Parents page' extremely helpful.

Both students and guidance counsellors use the news feed and TY work experience sections to keep up to date with all of the latest career opportunities. It has greatly enhanced our programme and we noticed the preparedness of 6th year students increase both dramatically and immediately on completion of the programme.

***Aoife Walsh***

***Guidance Counsellor – Malahide Community School – Dublin***

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I find that the REACH+ programme really helps as the pupils can work away and I can still keep an eye on them while multitasking! They enjoy the programme and it certainly suits where school have career classes.

***Kathy Finnegan - Guidance Counsellor***

***Deputy Principal – Wilson's Hospital School – Multyfarnham – Co Westmeath***

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This year 2014/15 we have introduced the REACH+ Programme to Senior Cycle - 4th, 5th, 6th year students. We find this to be extremely successful in that a wide range of subject teachers have adopted this programme and it can be used as a central Data Base - TY Coordinator & Careers teachers, LCVP Link teachers, the Mentoring Team - Principal, Dep. Principal, Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain, Computer teachers.

The CareersPortal Team was invited to come to the school to introduce the programme - this involved a detailed presentation in the computer room to all the parties involved, 11 staff members.

The instigator of buying into this programme was the Guidance Counsellor, who immediately brought the Mentoring Team on board - the Guidance Counsellor, the Chaplain, the Principal and the Deputy Principal. (4 teachers)

The Guidance Counsellor is also the Timetabler in the school and worked hard to ensure that those teachers using CareersPortal and the REACH+ Programme were timetabled for a computer room when necessary. (This will not work unless you are permanently timetabled in the computer room when using REACH+ - hoping that you might get access at a particular time is no use - it must be scheduled).

The Guidance Counsellor is also an LCVP teacher and introduced that excellent aspect of the REACH+ Programme to the LCVP Team, with a view to using REACH+ as a teaching tool for the LCVP Portfolio items, while the Guidance Counsellor, in covering the Career Investigation section, broadened out the use of REACH+. (+ 3 teachers)

The Guidance Counsellor looks after the Careers Programme in 4th Year - Transition Year, with 2 others, who all use REACH<sup>+</sup> during the weekly Careers class. (+ 2 teachers).

The Guidance Counsellor is timetabled for a once weekly Careers class with 5th and 6th Year students, again timetabled in the computers rooms, and makes full use of CareersPortal and REACH<sup>+</sup>.

The Guidance Counsellor works closely with the TY Coordinator. She looks after the Work Experience Programme and is using that section of CareersPortal. (+ 1 teacher). Next year she will also be timetabled for a Computer Room at Work Experience time.

The Guidance Counsellor is also timetabled for 2 Computer classes with all 5th & 6th Year students and uses this time, where possible, to continue with the Careers programme and makes full use of REACH<sup>+</sup>.

The most important person, in ensuring the success of running the programme in the school, is the IT Coordinator, who is also the Caretaker. He was present at the Induction Day and is familiar with the workings of the programme. He is on standby whenever REACH<sup>+</sup> is being used, to deal with any computer glitches. (+ 1 person)

The value of using REACH<sup>+</sup> was recently brought to my attention when the Deputy Principal had a meeting with the parent of a 6th Year student, who was concerned about his recent Mock Results. The Deputy Principal was able to call up the student's REACH<sup>+</sup> file and immediately had all of that student's details to hand - Junior Cert results, 5th Year results, Mock Targets, actual Mock Results, the student's interests and abilities, College Courses of interest, CAO list, PLC list. This enabled the Deputy Principal to have an informed discussion with the mother and put her mind at ease in that her son was being well monitored within the school, and was actually progressing much better than she had imagined.

On a daily basis I use the Guidance Counsellor Student Notes section of the CareersPortal REACH<sup>+</sup> Programme. I find it extremely useful to record the dates of meetings with individual students, and include bullet points for future reference.

I use the Guidance Noticeboard, CareersNews, and the links on the right of the student homepage on a daily basis and have instructed the students how to keep up to date. I am working on using the website - purely a lack of time is holding me back on this one. I hope to get working on bringing that into proper use during the summer holidays. There is such a vast amount of information involved in REACH<sup>+</sup>, it does take quite a long time to get used to it all. I am just about keeping a step ahead of the students - it does need you to do a lot of your own homework when you are new to it all!!!!

The Deputy Principal suggested that it would now be a good time to make a presentation to the entire staff, to show them how the REACH<sup>+</sup> Programme is working, and that it may be a good idea to bring the Senior Cycle Year Heads, and possibly Senior Class Teachers, on board, to involve them in a closer monitoring of their students.

The Workbook - due to pressure of time, we have made little use of the Workbook this year. Now that the computer programme is well set up, we can incorporate more use of the

Workbook next term. It will be very useful at the end of the school year, for assessment purposes for 4th Year and 5th Year groups. It will also be used by all 5th Year students to prepare for their visit to the UCC Spring Open Day and by 4th Year visiting CIT Open Day next term. I store the workbooks for the students in the Computer Room.

Money!!!! Nightmare!!!

As we introduced CareersPortal to 3 Year Groups in September, and wanted to get straight into using the programme, we distributed the books and licences, without getting money first. Now we find ourselves still trying to extract money (yes - in April) from students, and some 10 students have dropped out, leaving us with a debt.

Next year, only 4th Years will be paying, so the TY Coordinator will add the REACH+ cost onto the TY bill. - A relief!

All in all - I find CareersPortal & REACH+ to be an absolutely fabulous resource and am available to talk to anyone who is interested in using it.

***Nuala Ní Bhriain***

***Guidance Counsellor - Schull Community College – Cork***