

# Level 1 Learning Programmes

Report of consultation on background paper and brief



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# Introduction

The Draft Background Paper (BP) for Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) was developed in 2014 and sought to provide a rationale for NCCA to develop L1LPs. The paper captured in broad brushstrokes the sort of needs of the target group. It also summarised some of the current provision for the students concerned as well as provision in a few other jurisdictions internationally. Finally the paper began the process of proposing a brief for developing L1LPs. The draft BP was approved for consultation by NCCA Council in December 2014 and then was made available for consultation.

# The consultation process

The consultation process ran until March 22 2015. See appendix 1 for the questions asked in the online survey and appendix 2 for those who gave permission to be named as respondents to the online survey. The wider process included invitations to targeted interest groups, experts and representative groups as well as a substantial consultation event on February 23 in the Aishling Hotel, Dublin. See appendix 3 for those who attended the consultation event. In addition there were bi-lateral discussions with members of the Special Education Support Service, a small consultation focus group of teachers and principals familiar with the target cohort and a meeting of the NCCA's Special Educational Needs steering group (Appendix 4).

## The online survey

### Introduction

A survey was designed to capture responses to the Draft Background Paper (BP). Respondents were invited to provide some information about their experience of the needs of the students concerned and 13 questions invited responses to different parts of the BP. The online survey was open to anyone who wanted to provide a submission to NCCA on the Draft BP. In addition, certain interest groups and agencies were alerted to the consultation process and invited to participate. The latter group included Middletown Centre for Autism; PAVEE Point and the New Communities Partnership.

Seventy nine people responded to the online survey from all over Ireland and one from the UK. Respondents were mainly teachers (72%) and parents (19%).

The parents who responded provided a brief description of their son/daughter's needs and these proved to be wide-ranging. The following description underlines the complexity of the needs of many children in this cohort:

*My daughter (age 11) has a rare chromosome abnormality. Her intellectual disability is classed as low moderate to severe. She is also diagnosed as having Autism. She is very hyper active and she requires constant supervision. She has problems with motor skills, she can speak, but she is unable to describe her feelings and all her needs. She recognises some letters but has no numeracy skills. She attends a special school*

Parent, Co Cork

In general there was a positive response to the proposal to develop L1LPs and the overwhelming majority (93.1%) felt that the needs of the cohort had been captured by the BP. Many respondents expressed their hope throughout the survey that the L1LPs would be truly inclusive of the very diverse range of needs of the student cohort concerned which are unique to each individual.

All respondents agreed that the aims identified to steer the brief for developing L1LPs were appropriate albeit that some pointed out the need for more detail.

## Current provision

When asked to respond on a continuum about whether the considerations related to current curriculum provision in Ireland in the BP were captured well the overwhelming majority (98.21%) agreed that they were. Supplementary commentary revealed additional concerns about access to the services of health professionals; cuts in resources or difficulty in accessing them, including age-appropriate materials, assistive technology and SNAs; parents having unrealistic expectations of their children and the huge diversity in range of ability within the cohort as it was outlined in the BP. A number of respondents highlighted the difficulty in and the ad hoc nature of current assessment of the students in the severe and profound range as an issue.

When invited to provide information about any Level 1 learning programmes or courses they knew of being provided in Ireland QQI and ASDAN courses were the ones most often mentioned.

Issues identified by the Special Education Support Service related to using the NCCA's Guidelines for General Learning Difficulties and included the way they are presented and the absence of 'experiencing' in the continuum Attending, Responding, and Initiating phases.

## Priority Learning Units (PLUs)

There was quite a lot of feedback on the Priority Learning Units (PLUs) suggested in the paper. A sizeable number (67%) felt that the PLUs as presented were appropriate. Some (11 %) suggested using exactly the same headings as for Level 2 LPs particularly for those with needs in the low moderate range of disability—mainly for the purposes of continuity and consistency. There was strong opposition to including *Preparing for Work* on the basis that it would be inappropriate for those students with needs in the severe and profound range. Some respondents said that *Living in the Community* and *Numeracy* were not appropriate for students with severe and/or profound needs. A number (22%) suggested alternative PLUs or additional areas of learning that should be included under the PLUs proposed by the BP.

*I am currently teaching pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties and find that numeracy is not high on the priority list I would have for my pupils therefore to assign a whole PLU to it may not be meaningful to our pupils. On the other hand I do see its importance for many pupils in the moderate range.*

Teacher, Special School, Cork

There were suggestions to have skills such as social, physical and ICT skills cut across all areas of learning. All participants agreed that it should be the school's decision as to what themes or short courses best meet their students' needs.

## Assessment

A variety of assessment instruments seem to be used currently. There was not a lot of information provided on instruments used to establish baseline data and ascertain exactly where a student was starting from on enrolment. However, it was suggested that some teachers may be using the Carolina Curriculum for Pre-schoolers with Special Needs, or Carolina Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs.

All respondents felt that evidence of learning was essential and most felt that portfolio assessment and observation checklists were appropriate assessment approaches for the cohort. In addition there were suggestions to add interviews (to ensure the student's work was authentic); to use approaches similar to those used for Leaving Certificate Applied; and/or to use annotated photographs and videos. There were also appeals to ensure that whatever approaches are decided upon they take account of the very complex and diverse needs of the students concerned. This point was made by the Special Education Support Service (SESS)

Students may drift around – browsing and learning within a level - sometimes reaching to a higher level during some exploratory experience and at other times revisiting earlier functional levels, dependent on the time of day, the equipment being used, a familiar/unfamiliar environment, the health of the student or a preference for working with different members of staff or when medical or social or psychological conditions present problems for them.

Where concern was expressed about the potential for teacher bias in assessment, external moderation and/or partnerships between teachers from different schools were suggested as solutions. In addition it was felt that students should demonstrate achievement in a skill in more than one situation/with more than one adult, drawing upon a range of information, where appropriate.

The challenging behaviour that often accompanies the particular needs of the students concerned was also mentioned as a complicating factor in assessing progress and the point was made that reducing it or replacing it with more appropriate behaviour is critical for progress to be identified.

Seventy eight percent of respondents agreed that progression stages or milestones would be necessary for monitoring progress and to assist with assessment of the students in question. Routes for Learning (UK); Quest for Learning and Q skills (both from Northern Ireland) as well as MAPP (the Dales school in Yorkshire) were named as being useful for this purpose.

## Certification

Almost sixty percent of respondents felt that Certification should include mention of the level of support required by the student to merit an 'Achieved' grading. The following comment represents the most common response from those in favour:

*Indicating the level of prompting gives a more honest result and is more beneficial for informing the follow-on adult service when the student transitions.*

Principal, Special School, Galway

However, there were a small number of comments which expressed a lack of concern about the level of participation whether, attending, responding or initiating. These comments indicated that the emphasis should be on providing positive reinforcement for children and their parents who to date have had no formal recognition of the student's efforts.

*....it is also more supportive of the parents/guardians who delight at every step forward however small it may seem to others. This can be immense to carers and emotionally very comforting to both child and parent alike.*

Teacher, Special School, Cork

Some suggested that the level of support required could be available separately from the actual certification and could be available as additional information to the parents and professionals working with the student. One respondent commented that certification would have the welcome effect of encouraging parents to have higher expectations of their child/ren but there were more comments reflecting the view that parents tend to have unrealistically high expectations of their children.

Finally one participant commented,

*I find it difficult to reconcile national certification for students who may have no real or tangible understanding of what they are undertaking or achieving.*

Teacher, special school, Dublin

## Time allowed for completion of L1LPs

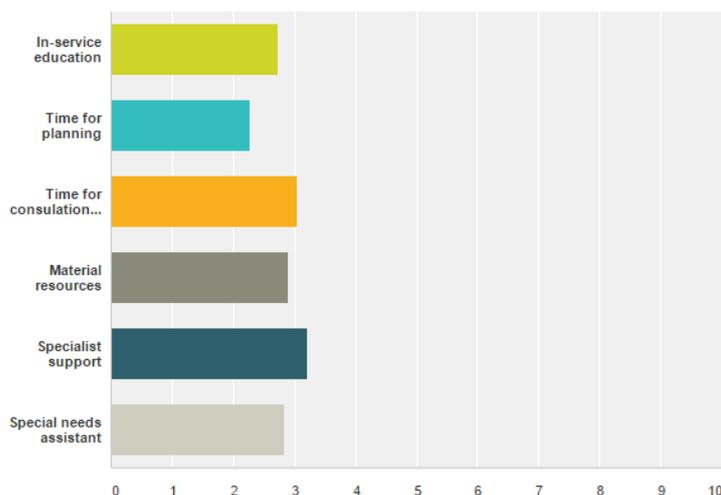
Sixty eight percent of respondents felt there should not be a time limit imposed on students to complete L1LPs with the rest in favour of a fixed time limit. Those in favour of the open time limit tended to cite the complex needs, the possible regression, the need for repetition and the diverse rates of learning of the students concerned. Those against, sought a fixed time or a 'recommendation' to ensure that teachers didn't put L1LPs 'on the long finger' and to ensure the 'integrity of the process'. Several people voiced their strong dissatisfaction with the wider system which sees many of the students concerned being forced to cease their learning programmes on transition from school to an adult service.

## Resources

Respondents were asked to rank a list of resources in order of importance to them. It reflects a relatively even distribution across those listed though interestingly the additional comments offered did mention the relative lack of either pre-service or in-service training in SEN more often than other resources or supports. This training was identified as being critical for teachers but also for SNAs. The point was also made that material resources should follow from target setting and planning.

**Fig 1. Resources**

**Q. 20. Please number the following resource areas in order of priority for you and your work.**



# The Consultation event

Due to the very complex and multi-faceted nature of the needs of the target cohort of students for L1LPs it was decided that a specialised group should be invited to participate in a consultation event which would focus on aspects of the draft BP and would mine ideas at a deeper level than the online survey could achieve.

Participants were invited from a wide range of interest groups including parents, school managers, teachers, psychologists, speech and language as well as occupational therapists, policy makers, as well as pre-service and in-service providers. Forty two people attended the event, all with experience of the needs of the intended cohort of children.

The day-long event was held in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin on February 23rd and focused on a number of workshops exploring key aspects of the brief for developing L1LPs.

Participants were allocated to seven groups to ensure a broad range of perspectives were shared. DES Senior Inspector Fionnbarra O'Murchu and Professor Michael Shevlin a SEN specialist from Trinity College Dublin joined NCCA education officers to act as facilitators on the day. Their roles involved keeping the groups on task and recording feedback from the participants. Interactive methodologies were used to keep contributors engaged and to maximise the amount of feedback harvested.

## Starter activity

Participants were asked to suggest 3 words per group which best summarised the key considerations for developing L1LPs. There was an extraordinary amount of similarity between the seven groups and the following were the words chosen:

- Individualised – student-centred programme; start with where student is now
- Communication – as key area of need
- Engagement – many of the students concerned are not in a state of readiness to learn
- Relevance - of learning for the student
- Continuity - from Primary and forward to post-primary as well as consistency of language
- Meaningful - most useful to students and in relation to the certification and award

- Diversity -of experiences and learning students are exposed to
- Flexibility - of learning programmes
- Incremental – learning of the students in question is frequently incredibly slow
- Realistic - achievable for students concerned
- Collaboration – between schools and homes as well as services from the fields of education, psychology, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy
- Training – needed for teachers, especially in mainstream

Other significant points made during this activity were that the assessment of curriculum covered should not supersede assessment of skills developed; that accreditation should not take priority over experiencing and engagement; that tokenism often expressed by those outside the world of SEN as a ‘Sure God help them’ attitude had to be avoided at all costs.

## Priority Learning Units (PLUs)

Contributors were invited to brainstorm what they believed to constitute the most important learning for the target cohort of students. They were then asked if the PLUs as proposed in the BP reflected that learning. If not then they were invited to suggest whether the PLUs of the Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) should be used or if they would like to suggest alternative PLU headings which would better categorise the important learning.

## Feedback

The most common core areas identified by the participants as important learning for Level 1 learners can be categorised as follows:

***Communication/communicating and literacy*** was the first choice of almost all groups. Communication was seen as a facilitator, the key to unlocking potential and underpinning all learning with participants. It was highlighted as allowing students to: express ideas and emotions; clarify their understanding positively modify their behaviour.

Elaboration notes or examples of learning included:

- Clear definition needed for ‘literacy’ in the context of L1LPs

- Pre-verbal, non-verbal to be included
- Developing contingency awareness
- 'Intentional' communication to be included (eye-gaze or vocalisation)
- Receptive and expressive communication to be considered
- Recognising verbal cues (tone of voice...)
- Ability to express oneself in one or more ways (signing, including Irish sign language, visualisation....)
- Recognising and communicating emotions
- Use of assistive and other digital technologies
- Retention of information

***Personal care and well-being*** were linked and listed by all groups.

Elaboration or examples of learning included:

- Awareness and communication of : self; needs; desires; feelings; own decisions
- Recognition of significant others
- Relationships and sexuality education as appropriate for stage of development
- Physical, social and emotional well-being
- Understanding of self-care
- Toileting and hygiene
- Safety – related to medicines and other people
- Resilience
- Tolerance

***Being part of the community*** was identified as a PLU by all groups in one form or another. Some used the language of the L2 PLU Living in the Community and Towards Independence was also used. In one group 'enablers in the community' were identified such as Scouts and Girl Guides.

Elaboration or examples of learning included:

- Awareness of self in relation to others and in relation to environments
- Appropriate engagement and interaction with peers and others in the community e.g. turn-taking
- Making transitions between different social and learning environments
- Being safe in the community
- Contributing to the community

**Sensory -Motor skills** featured heavily in feedback from the groups with some commenting that Physical skills as suggested in the BP are open to misinterpretation, are too rigid and suggest unrealistic expectations for the students in question. A key point made repeatedly was that Physical skills should not be narrowed to become focused on functions. This is also one core area in which the lines can become blurred between what the teacher can and is qualified to do and that which is the remit of the health professional.

Elaboration or examples of learning included:

- Awareness of one's body in space
- Sensory regulation
- Muscle tone, strength and coordination
- Eye-muscle balance and coordination
- Moving body or parts of body with purpose
- Developing fine and gross motor skills
- Sensory integration
- Rhythm and timing
- Interacting with the environment - in play and through the arts; to work a switch; to use a spoon; to indicate choices

**Preparing for life or preparing for adult life and/or towards independence** were all favoured over any mention of preparing for work which was not thought to be realistic as a core area of learning for the target cohort. Variations of this PLU included the addition of social skills and/or emotional development. Although sometimes these last two were separated into a core area of their own.

Elaboration or examples of learning included:

- Life skills/ social skills
- Managing and expressing emotions
- Problem solving
- Reducing dependence on SNA
- Understanding the community as an entity to which I belong
- Living in the community

**Numeracy and/or reasoning and/or mathematical and/or cognitive skills** were linked together with one group omitting any reference to numeracy or maths as a core area of learning for the students concerned.

Elaboration or examples of learning included:

- Thinking skills
- Pre-requisite skills for numeracy such as observing, ordering (first, next...)
- Name numbers
- Determining quantity
- Spatial awareness
- Identify cause and effect
- Understanding number
- Measuring time
- Problem-solving
- Making connections and recognising patterns
- Embedding numeracy and mathematics in thematic learning – in cooking, gardening...

Overall, there was little appetite for repeating the Level 2 PLUs with only one group opting for this approach and then with the proviso that they be underpinned by common skills such as those of problem-solving and cognition.

There was strong consensus that ALL learning for these students needs to be student-led and relevant to real life.

It was said continuously that engagement, communication, cognitive and social skills are paramount for the students concerned. This led to a suggestion that perhaps core skills such as these– like key skills at other stages of education - might need to supplement or be integrated across all other areas of learning.

Play, Art and Music were all mentioned as being essential to L1LPs. Not just as methodologies but as areas of learning.

# Assessment

The groups were asked to consider the following questions:

- How do we currently assess learning and progression for the young people concerned?
- How is the information we gather, used?

They were then asked to consider 4 possible assessment frameworks or approaches presented to them and consider if any could be adapted to support assessment of Level 1 learning. They were also invited to suggest alternative appropriate assessment approaches of their own.

The approaches presented included:

- A curriculum access tool (**CAT - GLD**) developed by the SESS and based on the NCCA Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Difficulties. This was presented by Helen Ginty, SESS as something that might be adapted to become an assessment tool. As a variation on this, there was a presentation by Dr Pauline Kerins of St Angela's College on a similar tool she has been working on – also based on the NCCA Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Difficulties.
- **Routes for Learning** (RfL) assessment material (developed by the Welsh Assembly Government material) was presented by Tish Balfe, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Quest for Learning (QfL) along with the follow-on Q Skills assessment material (developed in Northern Ireland.) The N. Ireland material was presented by Muireann Sadlier, SESS as a variation of Routes for Learning.
- **The progression continua** developed by NCCA for the new Primary Language Curriculum presented by Deirdre Murphy, NCCA
- **MAPP** (mapping and assessing pupil progress) material developed by the Dales School, North Yorkshire was presented by Ann Higgins, Principal of St Michael's House Special School, Baldoyle.

## Feedback

The key message from the day was that assessment needs to celebrate success. At the same time, it needs to authentically record the child's work so that the next stage of learning is accurately informed. There seems to be consensus that we need to focus on what is emerging for the child and work on taking him/her to the next step. Even then we need to expect there to be gradations of progress

between those two steps and it is these intermediary steps that teachers will need help in recognising and building on. It was suggested that at the design stage consideration must be given to how progress and achievement will be judged. Evidence of success and progression needs to be documented in forms such as photographs, portfolios, checklists or video recordings and used to help teachers make judgements.

Currently assessment practices are varied but daily assessment occurs - mostly using observation checklists – because the evidence of learning and progress with the cohort concerned is often fleeting and unsustainable. Sometimes the student will perform a task or demonstrate a skill with one adult but not another. For this reason the significance of family involvement was highlighted again. The fleeting and unpredictable nature of a L1 child's 'performance' gave rise to debate about whether assessing at a particular moment in time is appropriate and led to a discussion about when and how often we need to record. How many times will a child have to repeat the performance of a task or demonstrate a skill for him to be assessed as having achieved?

Student assessment is often recorded on school-devised documents and reported to parents in a variety of forms – verbally, in an assessment section of the child's IEP, or on a school-designed document. The main frustration voiced by parents is the pattern of feedback from staff untrained in SEN tending to emphasise what the student can't do rather than what s/he can do. This tends to be in schools not using frameworks like RfL or QfL and is often because IEP goals are too advanced and progress is so incremental it is observed by the family but not recognised as advancement by educators.

There was great debate about the language of scales or hierarchies that are most appropriate either in reference to the skill or functioning: not observed, emerging, achieved or ones that refer to the student's performance such as experiencing, attending, responding, initiating, generalising....It is generally accepted that 'experiencing' must be the starting point because some students will not tolerate an experience. Similarly, a lot of the students concerned lack the motivation to participate in their environment. Their passivity can present a significant challenge. In such cases helping them take part or reach a readiness to engage can represent significant progress.

Progress at this level can be vertical, when students develop increasingly sophisticated skills and understanding. It can also be lateral, when students consolidate and widen their application of knowledge.

In response to the different instruments presented, there was full agreement that the RfL / QfL (essentially the same) in combination with Q skills and MAPP would seem to meet the needs of

students of L1LPs with the proviso that we might need to take a closer look at the suitability of these for students at the upper end of the L1 continuum. Participants liked the fact that in RfL/QfL milestones are signposted. There are intermediate steps listed to take the student from one milestone to another with responses to look out for as evidence of the progress through these transitional steps. In addition, suggested activities are provided to support the teacher in mediating the milestones. Participants also liked the milestones of the new Primary Language Continua, which have been designed to provide intermediate steps as well. Though it was acknowledged that these would require further development if they were to meet the needs of L1LPs.

A key message from the event was that assessment needs to be student-focussed and skills-focussed as opposed to simply ensuring areas of the curriculum are covered.

## Other significant points

Throughout the day recurring themes were raised:

- The ‘normalising’ of inclusive education is seen as something that needs to happen sooner rather than later. This was expressed as a desire for a zero exclusion policy across schools, often possible because of clauses inserted in schools’ admission policies such as ‘depending on available school resources appropriate to the needs of the student’
- The range of needs at any level of education is diverse but it is thought that the needs of the target cohort for Level 1 LPs is particularly. This is reflected in the spread of learning outcomes under the PLU headings as well as the feedback on assessment. There is also the recognition that many students who undertake L1LPs will not progress to L2 but are still capable of making significant progress at Level 1
- The point was also made that preparing for adult life is an area of learning that should - and doesn’t always – continue into post second-level centres
- There was consensus that L1LP s must be student-led with parents/families being more involved in developing goals for students
- There was acknowledgment and appreciation of the patience of all professionals who work with children who have SEN. At the same time there was also a recognition that ALL teachers are teachers of children, not of subjects and the education profession needs to see children with SEN

less as 'problems' and more as presenting them with the challenge of how to use their professional training to meet the needs of ALL children on a continuum.

- Time allocated to medical, care and therapy needs of students can also be learning time and for that reason it is important that training be provided for SNAs as they are often the adults who look after this aspect of the child's care. Additionally, SNAs take their care of the young person so seriously that often, with the best of intentions, they assist the young person to the point where the SNA and not the student, has completed the work.
- The training that will need to be provided for teachers, both in initial training institutions and especially in mainstream schools cannot be over-emphasised. Teachers are the managers of learning, working with other significant adults in the classroom. They need to understand more fully their role vis a vis that of those other adults. There can be tension between a clinician's programme for the child and a teacher's.
- Many teachers need training in how to make baseline assessments in order to measure progress. Many will also require assistance in recognising incremental, supported steps in each PLU with guidance about the levels of scaffolding and levels of fading in scaffolding that are appropriate for individual children. Training in specific methodologies such as intensive interaction, response interaction and embedded instruction is required for one-to-one work with students. It is only with such specialised training for teachers that classroom collaboration with other adults leads to a complementarity which maximises the student's potential. Furthermore in order to facilitate the transdisciplinary approach needed at L1 some guiding principles for people from different services to work together may be required.

# Implications of the consultation for revising the BP and brief for development of L1LPs

It is fair to say that the consultation reflects the view that the draft background paper represented an excellent start to addressing the need for structured programmes, for coherence of implementation and for recognition of learning of the students concerned. This section looks at some of the considerations for further development of the background paper and brief for development of L1LPs.

The consultation has confirmed the diverse range of needs and abilities of the group of students concerned. Medical and physical needs can make their situations very complex. The range of pupils who are likely to engage in L1LP learning will vary, covering those who are at the early (emergent) stages of learning to those who are achieving higher developmental/learning levels but are not yet ready to engage with L2LPs. Some students will be able to progress to L2LPs while the needs of others will be best met by continued focus on level 1. There will be a need for frequent, scheduled monitoring to ensure that pupils are placed at a level appropriate to their needs. Consideration will need to be given to the needs of the students concerned.

## Priority Learning Units

The feedback suggests that in the main the proposed headings in the BP capture the essential learning. The process of developing L1LPs must on one hand be student-led but at the same time remain mindful of the need for equity of access to the common curriculum by ALL children. This is a challenging task but one in which meeting the student's needs must take precedence over a misguided notion of equity. Peter Mittler (2000), *Working Towards Inclusive Education: Social Contexts* says that

*....to be specific about the needs of distinct groups is not to undermine inclusion.*

Providing equal opportunities is about meeting individual needs – not about treating everybody in the same way.

If the PLUs suggested by the BP are decided upon there seems to be a need for the additional subtitles following the semi-colons, which perform the role of elaboration.

There is a suggestion though that NCCA needs to consider whether the important learning is presented differently – making some learning, like communication and engagement, more cross-cutting and integral to all other core PLUs. Preparing for life/adult life was also viewed by some as being missing

from current provision in some settings and while some think it would be situated comfortably in the *Being Part of the Community* PLU others feel it demands to be a separate core area.

Provision should be made where possible to have play, art, music and other appropriate stimuli found to facilitate learning for this cohort integrated to the PLUs. At all times, in the spirit of true inclusivity, the entitlement of the students to these as areas of learning, not just as methodologies should be emphasised.

*Physical skills* as a title will need revision as will *Living in the Community: Towards Independence*. The point was well made during the consultation that sensory motor development will need to be included in what's understood by Physical Skills. Likewise a strong case was made that the proposed title *Living in the Community* suggests a passivity whereas these students need to be a part of the community they live in.

Writing learning outcomes for the PLUs will require special attention so as to make steps as accessible as possible for students. The question was raised whether there would be the same expectations in terms of PLUs to be undertaken by students with severe and profound disabilities as those with needs in the low moderate range. This will need to be discussed by the expert group guiding the NCCA's development of L1LPs.

The frameworks such as Routes for Learning (UK), Quest for Learning (N. I.), MAPP (the Dales School in Yorkshire) and perhaps even the Continua for the Primary Language Curriculum (NCCA) are well worth looking at more closely for the progression steps and key milestones they provide. The first three in particular appear to allow for assessment of learning across this varied range of ability. They allow for very small steps in learning to be recognised; they acknowledge that learning for this cohort is frequently not linear and they also suggest how to take students to the next step from their current position. It is this level of detail which will be needed in terms of the curriculum development and assessment of L1LPs. It may not be necessary indeed to reinvent the wheel if one or more of these meets the needs of the Irish L1LPs. However it is clear that further research and thought must go into the PLUs before the work of developing L1LPs begins.

# Assessment

The key points made on assessment during the consultation process were that assessment approaches developed for students undertaking L1LPs need to:

- Begin at the level of recognising 'experiencing'. Florence Longhorn, a UK practitioner invited to speak internationally on severe and profound learning disabilities would contend that the vicarious experience is important. So, that a child with severe and profound disabilities may not cognitively appreciate a visit to a pantomime for instance should not preclude her from experiencing the sounds, smell, lighting, atmosphere and social encounter of such an event and that the stage of learning can and should be recorded as simply 'experiencing'
- Be sensitive enough to record the very small incremental steps that the students concerned make and the vertical and/or lateral nature of their learning
- Take account of the level of support required for the student and the ability to maintain skills so as to be authentic and accurately inform next steps in the student's learning
- Be flexible and varied so as to allow for many ways to record evidence – videoing, audio-recording, photographs, portfolios, observation checklists, family observations and so on.
- Provide guidance on how frequently evidence of learning must occur for the student to be judged as having achieved a learning outcome. In this regard the possibility for regression will need to be recognised
- Spell out features of quality or success criteria that would assist in judging a student as having merited a Level 1 award on the National Framework of Qualifications

## Certification

It is appropriate that certification be school-based. However the view emerged from the consultation that while any learning by this cohort should be recognised, a formal qualification sitting at Level 1 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) must have a threshold or minimum criteria to be met if that qualification is to avoid being tokenistic. It must represent a statement of the young person's skill or knowledge level to inform how best to provide what's needed next for him/her. A decision should be taken on whether to include the level of support required by the student to achieve e. g. hand-over-hand, with verbal prompt, independently....on the certificate or elsewhere with a requirement for that information to travel with the student and his/her certification.

The unconstrained nature of Level 1 on the NFQ is a concept that to be fair, most people are not familiar with. It should allow for recognition of any progress made by a Level 1 student. At the same time, it could provide criteria for those judged to have met requisite levels of skill development to gain an award. In this way, L1LPs will be similar to L2LPs which again recognise through school certification any accomplishments by students in PLUs while requiring minimum achievements for recognition that the award is well aligned with Level 2 on the NFQ.

## Next steps

This draft report on consultation has been presented to the NCCA's SEN steering group. It now needs to go to the Board for Junior Cycle and then to the NCCA Council. In parallel with these discussions a more informed process of developing L1LPs can begin with a group of education and health professionals. The group will be familiar with the needs of the student cohort and with current practice in this area of special needs education.

# Appendix 1: Online survey used during the consultation process

This draft background paper is the focus of a three-month consultation process until March 20 2015. As part of the process, you are invited to complete this response form. A report on the consultation will be posted on the NCCA website.

Level 1 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) recognises that there is potential for learning, assessment and accreditation for students NOT presently served by Level 2 Learning Programmes. These students are in different education settings, mainly special schools. Their learning difficulties fall into the low moderate, severe and profound categories of general learning disabilities. Many have additional, physical and/or health needs which impact on provision of their education.

This paper includes a review of Irish and international trends in curriculum provision for this group. The paper also proposes a brief for the development of a specification for Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs).

## \*YOUR DETAILS

### Name

### Address

### \* I am responding as a

(Please select the most appropriate option from the drop-down list below.)

Other (please specify)

For those working daily with students in educational settings

### If you work in an educational setting, please specify your role and responsibilities

- Principal
- Teacher in mainstream school
- Teacher in special school
- Resource teacher
- Learning-support teacher

Other (please specify)

### If you work with the children concerned but are not a teacher please describe your role and responsibilities

- SNA
- Speech and Language therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Educational psychologist
- Nurse

Other (please specify)

**If you are a parent of a child/children for whom you believe Level 1 learning Programmes would be suitable, please provide a few details about your child (e.g. age and the nature of your child's/children's needs)**

**Please rate your response in relation to this statement:**

**Although all the needs of Level 1 students can't be listed in a paper like this, those that are listed in the draft background paper (p.10) are associated with these students.**

- I agree
- I disagree

Do you think there are other significant additions to be made to this section of the paper?

**Please rate your response to this statement:**

**The current provision for Level 1 students has been accurately represented**

Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>				

**Are you aware of other existing forms of provision for Level 1 students? Can you give details of where these are being provided i.e. name and address of school or centre**

**Please rate your response in relation to this statement:**

**The section Some Considerations in Relation to Current Provision (p. 15) captures the main factors well.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>				

Comment or others you would like to add or delete (optional)

**Please rate your response in relation to this statement:**

**The aims in the brief to steer the development of Guidelines for Level 1 Learning Programmes are appropriate**

Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>				

Would you like to add a comment on the aims?

**Proposed Priority Learning Units (PLUs):**

**Do you have a comment on the proposed PLUs?**



**\* There is an argument that says the PLUs should be exactly the same as those for Level 2 Learning Programmes i.e. Communicating and literacy; Numeracy; Personal Care; Living in the Community; Preparing for work. In your opinion should the PLUs be:**

- The same as those for Level 2 Learning Programmes
- The ones suggested in this paper
- Different from either of these two

Please provide a reason for your choice



**Please rate your response in relation to this statement:**

**Schools should have the autonomy to decide how best to include short courses and thematic approaches that would enrich the student's learning at Level 1**

Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>				

Do you think anything else might be added to this section of the brief?

**Setting out procedures for assessment:**

**Portfolio assessment in addition to teacher observations would serve as appropriate approaches to assessment**

Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="radio"/>				

Please provide a reason for your answer

**Use of progression stages or milestones:**

**It is proposed that the Level 1 Learning Programmes would include progression stages or milestones as outlined in the proposed brief (p. 19) to track the progress of students in achieving learning outcomes. Do you agree with this proposal?**

Yes

No

Unsure

Please comment

**Do you have suggestions about other appropriate approaches to assessment?**

**Setting out procedures for certification:**

**It is proposed that the Level 1 certificate will not include details about the level of support required by the student in order to successfully achieve the tasks set (e.g. achieved with hand-over-hand support OR achieved with verbal prompts...) The certificate will simply state Achieved or Yet to be Achieved**

I agree

I disagree

Please provide a reason for your answer

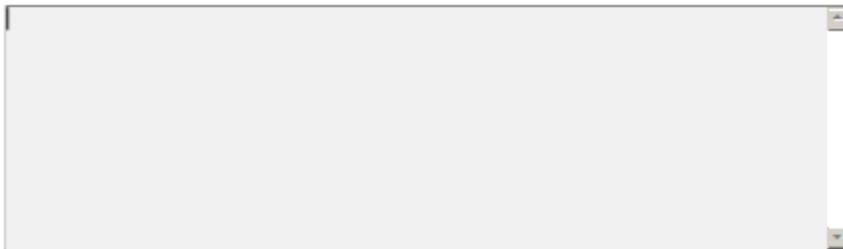


**It is proposed that there should not be a time limit on completing Level 1 Learning Programmes**

I agree

I disagree

Please provide a reason for your answer



**Q. 20. Please number the following resource areas in order of priority for you and your work.**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
In-service education	<input type="radio"/>					
Time for planning	<input type="radio"/>					
Time for consultation with parents and other key personnel	<input type="radio"/>					
Material resources	<input type="radio"/>					
Specialist support	<input type="radio"/>					
Special needs assistant	<input type="radio"/>					

Comment (optional)

**Please confirm that NCCA can include your name on a list of respondents to this consultation. Individual responses will not be attributed to any named person.**

Yes

No

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this draft background paper. A report on the consultation process will be available on our website.

INFORMATION ON LEVEL 2 LEARNING PROGRAMMES MAY BE FOUND AT  
<http://www.curriculumonline.ie/Junior-cycle/Level-2-LPs?lang=en-GB>

## Appendix 2: Respondents to online survey who granted permission to list them<sup>1</sup>

Rachel Moynagh	Deirdre Nolan	Moyna Staunton
Karen Lambe	Patricia Harrington	Teresa Mc Gann
Eadaoin Murphy	Mary Farrell	John O'Donaghue
Kathy-Anne Brennan	Donal O' Riordan	E. Doherty
Judith Gahan	Maura Madden	Special Education Support Service
Denise Harding	James Mc Mahon	
Simon Lawrence	Éillis Dillon	
Breda Dolan	Margaret Meade	

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<sup>1</sup> NB There were 77 responses in total. 46 granted permission to be named. 3 asked not to be named. The remainder skipped the question.

## Appendix 3: Attendees at consultation event

Margaret	Flood	Teacher and JCT associate for L2LPs
Judith	Callan Gough	Coordinator of L2LPs, JCT
Lorna	Lavelle	Whole School team, JCT
Madeline	Hickey	Director SESS
Fionnbarra	O Murchu	Senior Inspector DES
Muireann	Sadleir	Teacher and SESS associate
Helen	Ginty	Teacher and SESS associate
Pauline	Dempsey	Principal, St Anne's Sp School
Maria	Allen	Principal, School for Hearing Impaired children
Michael	Shevlin	Trinity College Dublin
Dolores	Mc Donagh	Director SEN, St Angela's College, Sligo
Áine	Moloney	Teacher, Grosvenor School, Leopardstown Rd
Ann	Higgins	Principal, St Michael's House, Baldoyle
Valerie	Kavanagh	D Principal, Scoil Na Naomh Uilig, Newbridge
Denise	Cole	Principal, Offaly School of Special Education
Lynne	Tierney	D Principal, ABACAS School of Special Education,
Jane	Dowling	Principal, St Patrick's Sp School, Kilkenny
Theresa	Tierney	National Educational Psychologist
Miriam	Twomey	Trinity College Dublin
Tish	Balfe	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
Áine	Henry	Occupational Therapist, St Michael's House
Kiearn	O' Callaghan	Teacher, Central Remedial Clinic
Lorraine	Higgins	Parent
Ted	Brennan	Parent
Audrey	Boyle	Parent
Mary	Byrne	Head of SEN, NCSE
Mariel	Cotter	Parent
Breda	Corr	General Secretary, NABMSE

Una	O'Donnell	Teacher, Scoil Triest Sp School, Cork
Margaret	Stapleton	SENO, National Council for Special Education
Áine	O'Neill	Church of Ireland College of Education
Órla	Ni Bhroin	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
Rosemary	Fahey	Principal, St Ultan's Sp School, Navan
Marian	Fitzpatrick	Teacher, Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock
Liz	Meaney	Occupational Therapist, St Michael's House
Nora	Marcinak	Psychologist
Pauline	Kerins	St Angela's College, Sligo
Ann Marie	Farrell	St Patrick's College, Drumcondra
Jacqueline	Horan	National Educational Psychologist
Padraig	O'Shea	Parent
Leah	O'Shea	Student of SMH Baldoyle
Teresa	Mc Gann	Principal SMH Gosvenor Sp School

## Appendix 4: NCCA's SEN steering group

Name	Organisation represented
Mary Byrne	National Council for Special Education
Mary Carrig	Irish National Teachers Organisation
Pauline Dempsey	KARE
Rosemary Fahey (Chair)	Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education
Marian Fitzpatrick	Teachers Union of Ireland
Sally Maguire	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
Teresa Mc Gann	NABMSE
Orla Ní Bhroin	St Patrick's College (SEN)
Fionnbarra O Murchu	DES Inspectorate
Carmel O Shea	National Parents' Council (post- primary)
Una O Donnell	National Parents' Council (primary)
Áine O Neill	Church of Ireland College of Education (SEN)
Maree O' Rourke	Joint Managerial Body
Sarah- Jane Willis	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
Michael Shevlin	Trinity College Dublin (SEN)
Maria Spring	Catholic Primary School Managers Association
Theresa Tierney	National Educational Psychological Service



