



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Report on the consultation on the revised Priority Learning Unit *Preparing for Work*



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1. Introduction

NCCA conducted a review of the Junior Cycle Level 1 Learning Programme (L1LP) and Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP) in 2022 to evaluate: the experience of teaching, learning and assessment of these programmes; and to identify key considerations for curricular provision in senior cycle (NCCA, 2023a) for students progressing from these programmes. The review identified a number of key actions for the NCCA, which can be accessed [here](#). One of the key actions arising from that review was a need to reappraise the Level 2 Preparing for Work PLU as the findings indicated that work-related preparation is more suited to curricular provision in senior cycle.

A Post-Primary Special Educational Needs (SEN) Development Group was established in 2022 to support SEN curriculum developments at post-primary level. Deliberations by the Development Group led to the updated draft Priority Learning Unit (PLU), which was renamed Skills for Life. This draft specification was approved for public consultation in December 2024 and can be accessed [here](#). The aim of this consultation was to seek the open and honest views of this draft PLU.

This report captures the feedback from students, teachers, parents and school leaders from a consultation process that took place from January to February 2025. Section 2 of this report describes this consultation process, followed by a synopsis of the emerging themes in section 3. A brief summary of feedback received from participants that falls outside the focus of this consultation is also included in section 3. Section 4 outlines considerations arising from the consultation and brings the report to a conclusion.

2. Consultation process

Consultation is a key aspect of the NCCA's work as it underpins the advice around curriculum development in Ireland. This advice is informed by feedback from schools, education partners, wider stakeholders and the general public. This section presents an outline of how this feedback was gathered and analysed to prepare this report. It is important to note that consultation in this case, unlike research, has a policy and practice focus rather than a theoretical one. The approach outlined in this section provides a summary of the consultative engagement and is underpinned by the principles set out in [NCCAs Research Strategy \(2023 - 2026\)](#) (NCCA, 2023b).

The review was designed to get feedback on a draft revised version of *Preparing for Work PLU*, with the working title of *Skills for Life PLU*. This design centred on three overarching questions listed below:

- What do you like about this PLU?
- What considerations do you have in relation to this PLU?
- Have you any other feedback in relation to this PLU?

In order to gather a wide range of perspectives in response to the questions outlined above, a mixed methods approach was employed during the review which included 10 school visits and an online survey. Participation in the consultation was encouraged in many ways including the NCCA website, social media platforms, and notifications sent to education organisations and stakeholders with a particular interest in inclusive and special education.

School visits

A representative sample of ten schools was selected from the 88 schools that expressed an interest in becoming involved in consultation on curriculum developments focused on special education. The ten schools were selected using criteria relating to a balance of special and mainstream schools (5 special schools and 5 mainstream schools), school size, type and DEIS status. A geographical spread was also considered to gain perspectives throughout the country. Student assent and parental consent was sought for students to participate in the school-based focus groups. A written record of all discussions was made during the school visits. Table 1 details the breakdown of participants that engaged in the school-based consultations.

Table 1: Breakdown of participants in school-based consultation visits

Participants	Number of respondents
Mainstream and special education teachers (SET)	10
Special Class Teachers	6
Special School Teachers	23

Deputy Principals	7
Principals	6
Students	43
Parents/Guardians	11

Of note from the breakdown of participants is the high number of students that were involved in the school-based consultations. The voice of the student provided valuable insights to the consultation process. They used various forms of communication supported by school staff, such as verbal, visual aids and through their Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices. They communicated what they enjoyed doing at school, what they disliked and how they think school could be better for them. This enabled the capturing of relevant information that could support the development of this PLU.

Online survey

The online survey was opened on January 6 and remained open for submissions until the 28 February 2025. Table 2 details the breakdown of respondents that completed the survey. A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey, whereby stakeholders were invited to respond. The online survey was open to individuals or those wishing to respond on behalf of an organisation.

Table 2: Breakdown of online survey respondents

Participants	Number of respondents
Mainstream and SET Teachers	13
Special Class Teachers	12
Special School Teachers	5
Principals (Special School)	1
Parents/Guardians	3
Other (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)	1
Organisation Submissions	4

Organisations and individuals who made online submissions and wished to be identified are listed in Appendices 1 and 2.

All data from the consultation was stored as digital files in line with [NCCA's Data Protection Policy](#) (NCCA, 2023c). The privacy of all participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as a contributor to the consultation. A thematic approach was used to analyse the feedback and was framed by the

overarching questions within the consultation. This helped to identify and analyse themes within the feedback gathered and a summary of this analysis is presented in the next section.

3. Feedback from the consultation: emerging themes

This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The findings have been grouped into the following areas that align with the overarching questions posed by the consultation:

- What features of the revised PLU are welcome?
- What features of the revised PLU need further consideration?
- The opportunities and challenges in implementing the PLU.

Features of the revised PLU that were welcomed

In general, the shift in focus from work-related activities to adaptive skills for daily life was welcomed and the PLU was considered relevant to students who follow a L2LP in junior cycle. This aligns with the findings from the broader review of the Junior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 programmes (NCCA, 2023a). The PLU was described as ‘more accessible’ in comparison to the previous *Preparing for Work PLU* and the succinct nature of the document was appreciated. Overall, feedback suggested that the PLU fosters independence due to its focus on personal development, and also supports students in engaging with the local community. Participants also acknowledged that this shift in focus was reflected in the change in the title of the PLU.

The acknowledgement of developing their own interests was also seen as a positive as this is something which could enhance their lives both inside and outside of school. Similarly, the focus on activities as the medium through which to achieve the learning outcomes was also seen as a welcome guidance note. Overall, the learning outcomes were described as clear, relevant and easily adapted across different learning environments with the potential for students to experience or achieve the learning outcomes in an inclusive environment with other peers through classroom, school or community-based activities.

It was also noted by some participants that this PLU will prepare students for work experiences that may occur in senior cycle. Students also commented on their fondness of work-related activities and experiences, both school-based and in the local community, that could prepare them for work-based placements in senior cycle and beyond.

There was broad welcome for the practical aspects of the PLU, and it was acknowledged that it followed a student-centred approach. In particular, the sections focused on health and safety and managing transitions were identified as being practical and supportive of students in accessing learning across all curricular areas. Similarly, the learning outcomes related to health and safety were welcomed as they were considered to be an essential pre-requisite to all learning in the school and wider community.

Participants from a special school context found the change in this PLU to be affirming of their current practice when describing the learning experiences they design to prepare their students for transitions to senior cycle and into adulthood. The learning outcomes related to managing transitions were identified as being particularly important for students following both L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle.

Feedback from parents also emphasised the importance of regulation strategies and how important developing these strategies are for their children's daily lives. Some teachers and principals also spoke of regulation as being key to a successful day of learning at school. One student identified his special class as being a refuge from the noise and busyness of the mainstream environment. Furthermore, feedback from the school visit consultations emphasised the importance of identifying key personnel that can support the student during transition times. Participants welcomed these key learning elements being reflected in the learning outcomes.

Features of the revised PLU that need further consideration

Overall, the level of challenge, flexibility and learning outcomes linked to health and safety and participation in activities were broadly welcomed. Some suggestions were made to improve the accessibility of the outcomes and there were aspects of the PLU identified as having potential to be strengthened to enhance the overall impact on student learning. In particular, points were raised for consideration under the sections on learning outcomes related to goal setting and managing transitions.

There were mixed views on the learning outcomes relating to goal setting. On one hand, participants welcomed their inclusion and the personalised focus it brought to student learning. On the other hand, some participants identified these as challenging for some students, while other participants were seeking more advanced learning outcomes to develop their students' experience and knowledge of goal setting.

Whilst the learning outcomes associated with transitions and self-regulation were welcomed, there were also calls to change the wording to a more neuro-affirmative approach to ensure the responsibility of regulation does not all fall to the student. Students themselves also highlighted the need to embed opportunities for relaxation during the school day.

Opportunities and challenges for implementation

While it was outside the focus of the consultation, understandably, participants offered feedback related to the implementation of the PLU. This section of the report provides a brief summary of opportunities and challenges identified by participants.

There were calls from teachers for the provision of teaching resources and age-appropriate materials along with the PLU to support its implementation, with teachers recognising how helpful teaching resources and materials can be in guiding the teaching and learning process. There was also a suggestion to develop structures, such as an online space, specifically for L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle where teachers could share resources and expertise.

Other participants spoke about the financial and personnel resources it takes to provide effective learning experiences that take place outside of school. For example, where principals and teachers are aiming to generalise a skill and achieve learning related to planning a journey, practising this in a real-life setting is preferable, which has financial and personnel implications. Schools called for support to access affordable transport and personnel required to address the health and safety

needs of students. Participants also noted the lack of therapeutic supports in schools, which affects students' ability to participate in learning experiences.

There were also calls for further professional learning supports to guide teachers in implementing the Junior Cycle L1LPs and L2LPs in the various settings. It was noted that to enable the successful implementation of PLUs in an inclusive environment, there is a need for full staff professional learning, and not just the provision of professional learning to those in special school or special class teaching and SET roles. In addition to professional learning supports, time for professionals to collaborate and administrative time for special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) were identified as key enablers to support successful implementation.

Similar to the previous review of the Junior Cycle L1LPs and L2LPS (NCCA, 2023a), there were points raised about the recognition of the students' learning. The importance of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) being released at the same time as the state examinations results was emphasised to ensure that all students' achievements are recognised at the same time, regardless of what curriculum is being followed.

4. Considerations and conclusion

The consultation on this revised *Skills for Life* PLU generated rich discussion and the consultation feedback provided direction and guidance for the Development Group when finalising the curriculum specification for this PLU. Overall, the shift in focus from work-based activities to daily living skills that support engagement with lifelong learning was welcomed and will enhance curriculum provision at junior cycle and offer progression to learning in a redeveloped senior cycle. The suggested areas for improvement were considered by the Development Group and feedback relating to the implementation of the PLU will be shared with the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) and the relevant agencies for their consideration.

References

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023a) [Review Level 1 and Level 2 Learning programmes](#) NCCA

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023b) [Research Strategy, 2023 - 2026 | NCCA](#) NCCA

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023c) [Data Protection Policy](#) NCCA

Appendix 1: List of Contributors: Organisations

The following is a list of organisations who responded via the online survey and indicated their wish to be listed as a contributor in this report.

St. Joseph's Adolescent School
National Council for Special Education
National Parents Council
Inclusion Ireland

Appendix 2: List of Contributors: Individuals

The following is a list of individuals who responded to the online form and wished to be listed as a contributor to this report.

Evelyn Sorohan
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