Background Paper and Brief for the development of senior cycle modules for students following Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

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Contents

6. BRIEF FOR THE POST-PRIMARY SPECIAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT GROUP

List of Acronyms

ALN	Additional Learning Needs
AON	Assessment of Need
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
ELPA	English Language Proficiency Assessment
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
ESAP	Essential Skills Achievement Pathway
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GIL	Guidelines for Individual Learning
GLD	General Learning Disabilities
HE	Higher Education
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICP	Individual Career Plan
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IEP	Individual Education Plan
JCPA	Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement
L1LPs	Level 1 Learning Programmes
L2LPs	Level 2 Learning Programmes
LCA	Leaving Cert Applied
LCE	Leaving Cert Established
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDCO	National Disability Coordination Officer
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NFQ	National Framework for Qualifications
PE	Physical Education
PLP	Personalised Learning Plan

PLU	Priority Learning Unit
QCAA	Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority
QCE	Queensland Certificate of Education
QCIA	Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RAR	Reasonable Adjustments Resourcing
SAC	Special Assessment Conditions
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENO	Special Education Needs Officer
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SET	Senior Education and Training
SET	Special Education Teacher
SIM	School Inclusion Model
SLES	School Leaver Employment Supports
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

1. Introduction

The Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022) was published in March 2022, following the response from the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, TD. The report records and responds to the views of teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders gathered during the four-year review about how senior cycle could evolve to meet the needs of all our young people. It provides strong foundations for the phased redevelopment of senior cycle in the coming years.

The Advisory Report identifies key areas for attention which will be crucial to realising the vision for a redeveloped Senior Cycle. These include providing more flexible pathways through Senior Cycle for all students; and a greater mix of subjects and modules, including the development of follow-on senior cycle modules for students progressing from Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes. Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) were designed for students who have a learning disability in the range of low moderate to severe and profound GLD while Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) were designed to meet the learning needs of students with low mild to high moderate GLD. This is a crucial addition to curricular provision in senior cycle that is necessary to deliver *equity and excellence for all*. This paper provides a background for the development of a series of modules and forms the basis for a consultation which will seek to elicit the views of a range of interested parties, including teachers, school leaders, parents and students, to contribute to this curriculum development.

Section 2 of this paper considers the history of education provision for students with special education needs (SEN) in Ireland. Section 3 details the development of the L1LPs and L2LPs and presents the main findings from the review of both programmes. Section 4 provides an overview of international trends and current practice in the provision of special education in other jurisdictions. Section 5 draws on the previous sections to categorise and briefly discuss some of the issues identified for consideration in the development of modules for senior cycle students. Finally, a proposed brief for the development of the new modules is set out in section 6 of the paper.

2. Background to special education provision in Ireland

This section outlines the significant developments in special education provision in Ireland since the establishment of the state in 1922, with a specific focus on students with General Learning Disabilities (GLD). It also outlines the policy initiatives and developments which are most relevant to the development of senior cycle modules which follow-on from the L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle. It concludes by detailing current provision in special education.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) defines special educational needs (SEN) as:

> *... a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition (Government of Ireland, 2004, p. 6).*

The EPSEN Act recognises that SEN occur along a continuum, ranging from mild to severe, and from transient to long term, and that students require various levels of support depending on their identified educational needs.

Students with a GLD, '*find it more difficult to learn, understand and do things than other children of the same age'* but '*they can continue to learn and to make progress all through their lives'* albeit '*at a slower pace than other children'* (NCSE, 2014, p. 2). A student with a mild to moderate GLD has very different needs and learning abilities to a student with a profound to severe GLD. Students following the L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle have an identified mild to moderate to severe and profound to severe GLD. L1LPs were designed for students with low moderate to severe and profound GLD while the L2LPs were designed to meet the learning needs of those students in the low mild to high moderate range of general learning disabilities.

History of special education provision in Ireland

All countries have distinct and complex histories regarding the education of students with SEN and their approaches to inclusion. Shevlin (2016) describes the progression of special needs education in Ireland in three phases: segregation, institutionalisation, and inclusion. However, he points out that these phases are not linear.

Since the establishment of the Irish state in 1922 until the early 1990s, students with SEN were often marginalised and educated in segregated settings, in special schools or in special classes (ibid.; Kenny, Mc Coy and Mihut, 2020). During the first half of the twentieth century there was little or no progress in the development of educational provision for students with SEN (NCCA, 1999). The needs of these students were considered predominantly medical, and therefore, educating students with SEN in mainstream schools was viewed as inappropriate (NCCA, 2015).

It was not until the mid-1950s that a number of voluntary organisations and religious orders, such as the Christian Brothers, the Carmelite order, and the Dominican order, took the initiative of establishing schools for students with SEN (Flood, 2013). This resulted in special schools being set

up in most counties during the 1950s and 1960s (NCCA, 1999). Students with SEN were often boarded in these special schools from an early age (Flood, 2013). In cases where it was not feasible to set up a special school, special classes were attached to mainstream primary schools (NCCA, 1999).

The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Government of Ireland, 1965) became the foundation for special education policy in Ireland up until the early 1990s. It made a number of recommendations that influenced the development of educational provision for students with GLD (NCCA, 1999). While, in some cases, it suggested the inclusion of special classes in mainstream schools, it predominantly called for an increase in places in residential special schools as well as the creation of extra places in day special schools (NCCA, 2015).

Educational policy, legislation, and practice for students with SEN has evolved over the past three decades. A series of legal cases taken by the parents of students with SEN against the state during the 1990s had a significant impact on education provision (Flood, 2013). For example, in 1993, a judgement ruled in favour of a young child with SEN in the O'Donoghue v. Minister for Health (1993) case and upheld the right of all children to a free primary education (Kenny et al. 2020). The ruling found that the State was obliged to modify the curriculum and teaching to ensure that children with disabilities could make the best use of their inherent capacities (Stevens and O'Moore, 2009 as cited in Kenny et al., 2020). The judgment also broadened the scope of the term 'education' when the presiding judge stated that education:

> '...includes giving each child such advice, instruction and teaching as will enable him to make best possible use of his or her inherent or potential capabilities.. however limited these capabilities may be (Glendenning, 2001, p. 2 as cited in MacGiolla, 2007).

Consequently, the constitutional definition of 'education' was broadened to include not only teaching and instruction, but also support services such as referral, treatment, and assessment (Kenny et al., 2020).

Developments in legislation, policy, and practice for the provision of special education

In 1992, Ireland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) which introduced the concept of a rights-based approach to the provision of education for students with SEN (Kenny et al., 2020). In 1991, the government established the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) and asked them to carry out a review and make recommendations on the educational provision for children with special needs from preschool through to post-primary (MacGiolla, 2007).

The SERC Report (Government of Ireland, 1993) recommended operationalising the rights-based vision proposed within the 1989 UNCRC (Kenny et al., 2020). It also recommended that students with SEN should be integrated into mainstream schools and classrooms so that they could participate in school activities with their peers where possible. Furthermore, the report introduced the concept of a continuum of educational provision for students with SEN in both

special and mainstream settings. It also recommended setting up a school psychology service that would be linked to the Health Service.

The influence of the SERC report was evident in the 1995 *White Paper on Education: Charting Our Education Future* (Government of Ireland, 1995). For example, in the White Paper, the Government affirmed that its objective would be to ensure a continuum of provision for students with SEN (Flood, 2013). It stated that the provision of education for students with SEN would be flexible and include the option of mainstream school, special school, or a combination of both based on the results of a needs assessment of each child (ibid.). The White Paper identified the lack of substantive legislation for primary and post-primary education in Ireland and set out what future legislation would focus on.

The 1995 *White Paper on Education: Charting Our Education Future* was followed by several pieces of legislation that influenced policy and practice for the provision of education for students with SEN, including GLD. These include the Education Act 1998; the Education (Welfare) Act 2000; and the Equal Status Act 2000; the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004; the Disability Act 2005 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Ireland ratified in 2018. Figure 1 provides a timeline of key milestones in special education policy development and supports.
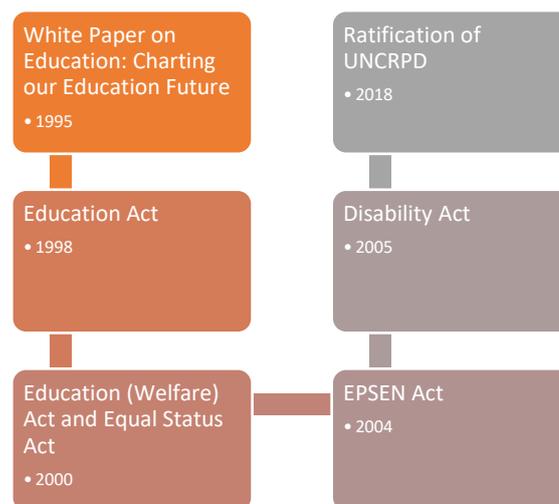
Figure 1 Timeline of key milestones in special education policy development and supports.

The 1998 Education Act was of huge relevance to the inclusion of students with SEN as it outlined their constitutional rights to have access to education and to have access to the resources required to participate in education (MacGiolla, 2007). The Act states that the Minister for Education has a function in ensuring that an education appropriate to their needs will be made available to persons with disabilities or other SEN (NCCA, 1999). Part VII, section 41 (f) of the Act specifies that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) will advise the Minister on the requirements, as regards curriculum and syllabuses, of students with a disability or other SEN.

Under the terms of the Education Act 1998, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) was established by the Government in 1999 as an executive agency of the Department of

Education and Science (NCCA, 1999). Its objective was to provide educational psychology services for all students in primary and post-primary schools and in other educational settings supported by the Department. The definition of special needs under the 1998 Education Act was not as broad as the one contained in the 1993 SERC report, and, in effect, it led to the exclusion of children who experienced emotional, social, and material adversity (MacGiolla, 2007).

The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 provided for the right of every child to a certain minimum level of education. The Equal Status Act 2000 prohibits discrimination on nine grounds, including disability. This Act puts the onus on schools to put supports in place to meet the needs of students with SEN.

The EPSEN Act 2004 changed the landscape of special education provision (Banks and McCoy, 2017). It emphasised that children with SEN should, where possible, be educated *'in an inclusive environment'* (Government of Ireland, 2004, p. 5). Schools were made responsible for developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to support students with SEN to access the curriculum (MacGiolla, 2007). The Act also made provision for the establishment of a National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and set out the responsibilities of the Special Education Needs Officers (SENO) (ibid.).

It is important to note that to date not all sections of the Act have been implemented (Kenny et al., 2020), however, the EPSEN Act radically changed the education landscape in Ireland *'from one in which the provision of inclusive education was an emerging feature of schooling to a system in which the provision of inclusive education is mandatory'* (Meaney, Kiernan, and Monahan 2005, p. 209). It came with a caveat, however, regarding the assessed appropriate impacts for both the child with SEN and their peers in such settings which meant that inclusion was mandatory *'except where this would not be in the best interests of the child or would be inconsistent with the effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated'* (ibid. p. 209).

The DE are currently undertaking a review of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004. The purpose of the review is to ensure that legislation on education for students with special educational and additional needs is up to date, fully operational, and reflective of the lived experience of students and families. The timing of the review and legislative updates, may have implications for the development and enactment of follow-on modules at senior cycle.

The Disability Act (2005) further consolidated the rights of children with special needs and supported the objectives of the EPSEN Act (NSCE, 2006). However, the Disability Act maintains that provisions for children with additional needs will only be made if there are available resources as determined by the minister.

The Assessment of Need (AON) process is a statutory process under the Disability Act (2005) whereby the Health Service Executive (HSE) reports on the health needs and the education needs of a child/young person. All children/young people born on or after 1 June 2002, who are suspected of having a disability, are eligible to apply to the HSE for an Assessment of Need (AON). If the HSE Assessment Officer forms the opinion that a child or young person requires an assessment of education needs as part of the HSE AON process, they will contact the NCSE. The NCSE is required to assist the HSE in organising an assessment of a child's or young person's education needs as part of this process. The NCSE is responsible for nominating a person with the

appropriate expertise to carry out the assessment of education needs when requested by the HSE. The educational component of the AON process refers only to assessment of education needs as identified in the school as part of their planning and support for their students. The Report of Education Needs for the purpose of AON is informed by school-based information. The Report provides information to the HSE on how the child/young person is learning in school and where the school has identified additional educational needs. While schools are being asked to complete the education section, the Assessment of Need is a HSE process and HSE are responsible for the overall report issued to parents/guardians. The DE is committed to monitoring how the AON process is working in schools and will formally review the process at the end of the school year in 2023; this is with a view to ensuring that any additional guidance, support or resources are put in place at the earliest possible opportunity.

Ireland has new international obligations since it ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2018 (Kenny et al., 2020). The Convention promotes respect for the inherent dignity of those with disabilities and covers a range of rights including civil, political, social, and economic rights in areas such as education (ibid.).

In common with other countries, one of the main implications of the ESPEN Act is that the number of children with SEN attending mainstream schools has increased dramatically over the past two decades (McCoy et al., 2016). Students with SEN now make up over a quarter of the school population (McCoy, Shevlin, and Rose, 2019). This has resulted in a huge increase in government spending because of the increase in the number of special classes, resource teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) needed (Banks and McCoy, 2017). The type of special class has changed from the traditional mild GLD model to more specialised classes/units, for example, for students with Autism (Banks and McCoy, 2017). The NCSE (2018) estimates that 18-25% of children in Ireland have a Special Need and that 1-3% of that population have a GLD. Of those with a GLD 85% have mild GLD, 10% have moderate GLD, 3-4% have severe GLD, and 1-2% have profound GLD.

Since the 1990s, Ireland has clearly been seeking to shift provision for students with SEN to inclusive and mainstream provision. It now has a 'multi-track' approach to the provision of education for students with SEN (Shevlin, 2016; Banks and McCoy, 2017, 2018; Kenny et al., 2020). Students can now attend mainstream classes in mainstream schools where they usually receive supplementary teaching (McCoy, Quail, and Smyth, 2014a). They can also attend special schools or special classes in a mainstream school designated for a particular disability (or range of disabilities) (Banks and McCoy, 2017, 2018).

In 2017, a new funding system for SEN was introduced in Ireland to support a more equitable approach to SEN provision (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). This has culminated in the removal of the requirement for students to be diagnosed to access supports (Kenny et al., 2020). Resources are now automatically allocated to schools based on a school's profile and schools have more autonomy regarding how resources are distributed (NCSE, 2017). This is the Special Education Teacher (SET) Allocation Model, which is designed to provide a single, unified allocation of teaching resources to mainstream primary and post-primary schools. The current SEN spend is 2.2 billion, which is approximately 25% of the Department of Education's budget.

In 2019, the NCSE announced the pilot of the School Inclusion Model (SIM) for supporting inclusive education in mainstream primary and post-primary school settings. This pilot model aims

to build a school's capacity to include children with additional needs and to provide other supports for students (Kenny et al., 2020). In the 'Progress Report – Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes' (NCSE 2019), the NCSE outlines its vision for 'Total Inclusion' for students with additional needs within mainstream school classes (Kenny et al., 2019).

Section summary

The approach to inclusion in education for children with SEN, including GLD, has developed significantly in Ireland in recent decades. Ireland has adopted a rights-based approach to education for students with SEN. Legislative developments have impacted on education policy and practice for students with such needs. The most significant policy developments in special education include the Education Act 1998 and the EPSEN Act 2004.

In recent decades, Ireland has adopted a 'multi-track' system. This system provides students with SEN with options and flexibility to access the curriculum and supports depending on their identified needs, and opportunities to participate in mainstream educational settings with their peers where possible.

3. Curriculum provision for students with general learning disabilities

Since the introduction of the Junior Certificate in 1989 there have been significant changes in society and within education to support children with GLD. This section examines the curriculum provision for students with GLD at post-primary. It outlines how the development of the L2LPs and the subsequent development of L1LPs evolved.

Curriculum developments

In 1999, NCCA published a Special Educational Needs: Curriculum Issues paper. This paper was intended to stimulate discussion and debate that would inform and assist the work of the NCCA in the development of curriculum guidelines, which would provide access to an appropriate education for all students with GLD, in all types of educational settings (NCCA, 2015). The NCCA paper (1999) acknowledged that students with SEN, including GLD, have the right to enjoy a full educational experience but pointed out that the pathways and the time required to achieve this may be different to that of their peers in mainstream who do not have SEN.

Following on from the discussion and debate stimulated by the publication of the Special Education Needs: Curriculum Issues (NCCA, 1999) paper, NCCA developed a set of draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities. The guidelines were developed for use in all educational settings and were to be accessible to all teachers and professionals working with students across the range of GLD.

The consultation process for the Guidelines (NCCA, 2007) highlighted a gap at junior cycle for students who had mild to moderate GLD (NCCA, 2015). Students within this group, despite having access to extra teacher support, flexible programmes like the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and differentiation, were accessing the curriculum at a level that did not allow them to gain nationally recognised certification (ibid.). The consultation process also highlighted that the junior cycle mainstream curriculum was not appropriate was not appropriate for students who need more specialised and more focused support for their personal and social development, and for whom vocational development was particularly important at this stage in their education.

This led to the development of the L2LPs, as an alternative pathway for students with low mild to high moderate GLD within the new Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). The introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle further emphasised the necessity of developing curricula guided by the principle of inclusion:

> *Subject specifications and short courses developed by the NCCA will be designed to be as universal as is feasible, providing meaningful and valuable learning opportunities for students from all cultural and social backgrounds and from a wide variety of individual circumstances. This includes ensuring that the learning opportunities are as accessible as possible to students with special educational needs and that statements about the skills to be developed are articulated in a way that reflects this* (NCCA, 2015, p. 26).

Level 2 Learning Programme

Level 2 Learning Programme: Guidelines for Teachers were introduced in 2015 as part of the Framework for Junior Cycle and replaced the *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* for this particular cohort of students. L2LPs were designed to meet the learning needs of those students in the low mild to high moderate range of ability because it was recognised that such students may not be able to access some or all the subjects and short courses on offer at junior cycle that are aligned with Level 3 of the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ). Such students may be attending either a mainstream or a special school. The L2LPs were developed in consultation with parents, carers and professionals working in the field of education and special education.

The students in this group are small in number (one or two in a mainstream school). Students completing the L2LPs all have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The L2LPs are designed around five Priority Learning Units (PLUs) rather than traditional academic subjects. There are several elements in each unit and every element has different learning outcomes for students to experience and achieve (NCCA, 2015). The five PLUs include:

- Communicating and Literacy
- Numeracy
- Personal Care
- Preparation for Work
- Living in the Community.

These PLUs can be taught separate to or can be integrated into mainstream subject teaching. Two short courses are also taught as part of the programme. These can be NCCA developed short courses or school developed short courses. The L2LPs are assessed on an ongoing basis in school and are designed in alignment with Level 2 qualifications on the NFQ.

Level 1 Learning Programmes

In order to ensure equitable access to the curriculum for the cohort of students with GLD in the low moderate to severe and profound range the Level 1 Learning Programmes: Guidelines for Teachers were published (NCCA, 2018). The L1LPs were developed in consultation with parents, carers and professionals working in the field of education and special education.

Students taking L1LPs are likely to be at an early stage of cognitive development, and some students may have an identification of a GLD which falls in the range of low moderate to severe and profound from an educational or clinical psychologist. The majority of students with this degree of learning disability are in special schools, or special classes in mainstream post-primary schools (NCCA, 2018). These students often have complex and multiple cognitive and functioning needs (ibid). They may experience difficulty understanding the world around them and their place in it and may also find expressive and receptive communication challenging, however, this group of learners have their own individual strengths and interests, which can be used to access, benefit from, and participate in, education.

These students all have their own Individual Education Plan (IEP), and their learning tends to be targeted at an early developmental level. The L1LPs are made up of six PLUs, which explicitly identify and develop the key areas of learning needed to prepare the students for their future lives. Each PLU is broken into different elements with each element having different learnings outcomes for students to experience and achieve. The six PLUs are:

- Communication, Language and Literacy
- Personal Care and Wellbeing
- Being part of a community
- Numeracy
- The Arts
- Physical Education

Some students, undertaking the L1LPs or the L2LPs, may continue to focus on some aspects of PLUs and short courses into senior cycle, to consolidate or progress their learning. Further details on progression into senior cycle are outlined later in this section. Post-school options include adult day services, which are HSE funded programmes to provide day care activities, supported employment, and voluntary work programmes for people with high support needs.

Summary of findings from the review of the Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

In 2022, NCCA conducted a review of the L1LPs and L2LPs in junior cycle. The review was designed to gain insights into the following areas:

- Criteria and process that schools use to identify students whose needs would be better served by the L1LPs and L2LPs
- PLUs, and short courses of the L1LPs and L2LPs
- Planning and collaborating
- Assessment and reporting arrangements
- Pathways into senior cycle for students currently following the L1LPs and L2LPs.

The data and information were gathered through school visits, focus groups, online surveys, and written submissions from stakeholders. School review visits were carried out in a total of nine individual school settings during the month of October 2022. A thematic approach was used for data analysis framed by the areas for exploration set out above. This helped to identify and analyse themes within the data gathered.

The findings of this review echoed findings from the review of senior cycle (2017 – 2020) (NCCA, 2022) which indicated that the introduction of the L1LPs and the L2LPs in junior cycle was viewed as a very positive step towards greater inclusivity. Teachers, principals, parents, and stakeholders overwhelmingly welcomed the introduction of the programmes as it enabled

students with specific SEN to have equitable access to an inclusive and appropriate curriculum that is accredited and publicly recognised, ensuring parity for all students.

Criteria and process that schools use to identify students for Level 1 and/or Level 2 Learning Programmes

Students who engage with the L1LPs and the L2LPs will usually have an assessment provided by an educational psychologist or other professional depending on the complexity of students' individual needs. The decision to enrol a student in either programme is typically informed and supported by psychoeducational reports and robust identification procedures used by the school. The assessment of an individual student's needs commonly includes consideration of the student's cognitive ability and standardised assessments, teacher and parent observations and monitoring of targeted intervention provided by the school, and the support of a professional also, where available.

Feedback from the review indicated that, by and large, there are no major difficulties applying the criteria and process in special schools and special classes as students attending them generally have psychological reports, which contain the relevant educational information and recommendations. Many of the students in special schools will follow the L1LPs although some students will follow the L2LPs as appropriate.

However, the review indicates a need for further supports for mainstream schools to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the criteria and process used to identify students. Students in mainstream schools will usually be following the L2LPs in mixed ability classes or in special classes. Feedback illustrates a need for a greater understanding of the use of assessment and screening for identification of need and to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Feedback also indicated a need for greater understanding of evidence based targeted interventions. In general, there was evidence that psychological assessments, as well as teacher observation and parental input, were used to determine if a student's learning needs would be best served by the L2LPs or, in some cases, a blend of curricular components from L2LPs and Level 3. The review highlights a need for more support for the implementation of the SET Allocation Model and the Continuum of Support in some mainstream schools.

Priority Learning Units and short courses of the learning programmes

Insights gained from the review indicate that the PLUs for both the L1LPs and the L2LPs target those skills identified as relevant and important for students to develop at this age and stage. At L1, the flexibility provided by the broad learning outcomes across the PLUs (Communication, Language and Literacy, Personal Care and Wellbeing, Being Part of a Community, Numeracy, The Arts and Physical Education) were very much welcomed. The broad nature of the learning outcomes enabled teachers to address the individual progress of their students who often have complex needs. The flexibility to tailor the curriculum around the individual needs of the students was frequently commented on by teachers. However, it was acknowledged that the level of autonomy afforded by the learning outcomes meant that more time was required for planning, collaborating and personalisation of the learning.

The L2 PLUs of Communicating and Literacy, Numeracy, Personal Care and Living in the Community were broadly welcomed and described as being relevant and meaningful for students following the L2LPs. However, specific to the L2LPs, the review suggests a need to reappraise two PLUs, *Preparing for Work* and to a lesser extent *Living in the Community*. Respondents outlined concerns about the *Preparing for Work*, with many indicating that *Preparing for Work* was better suited for senior cycle students. While respondents liked the *Living in the Community* PLU, some felt that certain elements of this PLU, for example, *Using local facilities*, were less relevant for the age and stage of their students. Other respondents felt that parts of *Living in the Community* could be updated, and the learning progressed into senior cycle.

There is also evidence of a misunderstanding that the PLU in *Numeracy* for L2 is a replacement for the subject of Maths at Level 3, particularly for those students who find the subject challenging. Findings indicated that additional guidance and support is recommended in this area.

The flexibility provided by the L1LPs short courses and the L2LPs short courses was welcomed. Feedback indicated that schools have successfully enacted the short courses at L1 and L2. A number of examples were provided where schools successfully modified the short courses. For example, the L2LPs *CSI Forensic Science* short course was modified to enable a student following the L2LPs to participate in the mainstream science class. Furthermore, many examples were given where the L2 short course *Caring for Animals* was modified to enable a student following the L2LPs to link in with their local community or homelife and a student's particular interests. Feedback also indicated that schools would welcome the development of further short courses at L1LPs and L2LPs, where a particular need or interest was identified. Areas suggested included cooking, banking, and health and fitness. Some feedback indicated that the provision of wellbeing short courses, particularly at L2, would be welcomed as they could link in with Level 3 Social. Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Physical Education (PE). They would also welcome more resources to develop, design and plan their own short courses.

Planning and collaborating

A challenge highlighted by the review was making time for planning for learning and collaborating with colleagues on the L1LPs. Most special schools operate under primary status and so have full contact hours. This means that opportunities for teachers to plan collaboratively happen mainly before or after school hours or during Croke Park hours. Furthermore, feedback indicated that their status as primary schools resulted in many special schools having no subject specific teachers and appropriate facilities for post-primary teaching and learning in practical subjects, such as Home Economics. Consequently, some schools found it more difficult to address certain learning outcomes, for example, those relating to the preparation of food.

Planning for the L2LPs was also challenging, according to feedback from teachers who indicated that finding the time to plan and collaborate with colleagues was difficult, particularly where the student is accessing L2 PLUs in mainstream mixed-ability classes.

Further challenges in terms of planning for learning included a lack of resources and relevant age-appropriate material that could be easily accessed from either textbooks or a central repository.

Feedback indicated that teachers would like more Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to support the implementation of the L1LPs and the L2LPs in different settings. This would assist in addressing the challenges they found with planning the programme in their school and collaborating with colleagues.

Assessment and reporting arrangements

The assessment of the learning in the L1LPs and the L2LPs is classroom-based. Students assemble evidence of their learning in a portfolio, which is submitted to their teachers and the students' work is assessed and reported on. The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) documents the achievement of the student in PLUs, as reported by the school. There was a consensus amongst respondents that ongoing assessment was the most relevant evaluation process for student following a L1LPs or a L2LPs. The main challenge raised in terms of assessment was gathering evidence of learning, with schools indicating different methods have been employed, such as digital and hardcopies records, with varying degrees of success. There was general agreement amongst the schools that it was down to the discretion of the teacher to monitor, review and evaluate progress through engagement with the PLUs and short courses and the ongoing assessment process.

In terms of reporting, the opportunity for students to engage with a meaningful curriculum in an inclusive manner and receive certified recognition for their work and achievement was highlighted as significant by all stakeholders, teachers, principals, and parents. All parents interviewed as part of the review visits felt strongly that their children should students should receive recognition of their learning and achievement in the form of a JCPA at the same time and occasion, and alongside their peers, regardless of what level (Level 1, 2 or 3) of the curriculum is followed. The JCAP is released many months after junior cycle students receive the provisional results of their state examinations, which is celebrated in schools in September.

Other feedback arising in the review

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
Feedback indicated that teachers would like more CPD to support the implementation of the L1LPs and the L2LPs in different settings. This would assist in addressing the challenges they found with planning the programme in their school and collaborating with colleagues.

School status
As mentioned, special schools have primary status and feedback indicated that this can be challenging when planning for teaching and learning and implementing the post primary curriculum. Many special schools have no subject specific teachers and consequently find it more difficult to address some of the learning outcomes in their classrooms. Concerns around the inconsistency of language across the primary and post-primary curriculum were also noted.

Resources and supports
Concern was expressed about a lack of resources in terms of space and funding. Many of the special schools outlined a need for appropriate facilities for post-primary teaching and learning in practical subjects. Much of the feedback indicated the need to secure more specialist SEN teachers and SNAs.

Pathways into senior cycle for students currently following the Level 1 or Level 2 Learning Programmes

Supporting students to plan for and transition to life after school and a range of diverse futures is an important feature of senior cycle. Independence means different things for everyone; however, it has particular importance for students with GLD. Empowering students to take responsibility for their own decisions, travel independently on public transport, manage money, live, and engage with their community and so on, are important life skills for students. During the review process, perspectives on the transition from junior cycle to senior cycle for this cohort of students were sought. Feedback overwhelmingly highlighted an urgent need for curricular provision in senior cycle for students currently following the L1LPs and L2LPs. The lack of specific pathways at senior cycle for these students is evidenced across the feedback gathered which indicates the variety of options offered to students as they progress into senior cycle. The options provided include but are not limited to: Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) modules, Leaving Cert Applied (LCA), Leaving Cert Established (LCE), school developed programmes and ASDAN courses.

Parents were universal in their opinion that a senior cycle curriculum was crucial for their children's education and wellbeing. They felt that a curriculum in senior cycle should contain modules that supported their children in the world of work as well as giving them skills to navigate their own personal lives. For students following the L2LPs, respondents frequently mentioned the importance of developing social skills and communication skills in senior cycle, as well as progressing their learning from junior cycle. Supporting transitions to life after school was frequently mentioned for students following the L2LPs. Insights from the review indicated the importance of equipping students with skills for employment, voluntary work and living in the community.

The findings of the review suggest that follow-on learning for students who complete the L1LPs will need to consolidate and progress learning as appropriate in senior cycle and prepare students for life after school. Particularly for students following a L1LPs, feedback, indicated that respondents saw a significant disconnect between school and adult services for students transitioning out of the school.

Respondents to the review had a number of suggestions as to what senior cycle pathways should consider:

- Senior cycle learning programmes that focus on living skills and be modular based in character.
- An opportunity to engage in work experience with an extended supported employment element after the student leaves school.
- Some academic focus should be maintained but in the context of supporting current levels of academic attainment.
- Senior cycle learning programmes which are flexible enough to engage individual students at their level of need and areas of interest.

- Senior cycle learning programmes which have a cogent transition strategy that engages adult services whilst students are still in school.

A more detailed analysis of the data and information on the review on the L1LPs and the L2LPs can be accessed on ncca.ie.

Section summary

The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) provided the L2LPs and the L1LPs as options at junior cycle. Students undertaking these programmes experience the curriculum through engagement with PLUs, short courses and other curriculum and learning experiences. For some students undertaking L2LPs or L1LPs, the period needed to complete their programmes may extend beyond junior cycle. They may choose to focus on some PLUs and short courses in junior cycle and complete the remainder as all or part of their senior cycle experience or they may continue to work towards successfully completing them at senior cycle.

NCCA conducted a review of the L1LPs and the L2LPs in 2022. Participants in the review welcomed the Level 1 Guidelines for Teachers and Level 2 Guidelines for Teachers. Feedback from the review indicated the need for further supports, particularly for mainstream schools, to ensure clarity on the criteria and process for identifying students whose needs would be better served by L2LPs and the L1LPs. Teachers also reported that they valued more time for planning and collaboration. Feedback from teachers, parents and stakeholders highlighted the importance and value placed on being able to complete the junior cycle for these cohorts of students and receive certification in the form of a JCPA alongside their peers. Many teachers indicated that they required more support, in terms of CPD and additional guidance, in teaching the L1LPs and the L2LPs. A desire for more resources and accessible materials was expressed.

The review also found that there was an urgent need for an equivalent programme at senior cycle as well as the need for more connectivity and improved transitions between school and adult services.

4. International trends on pathways for students with general learning disabilities

Special education provision in four jurisdictions was examined to gain an overview of the pathways for students with GLD within the broad range of SEN in senior cycle in other jurisdictions. All the chosen jurisdictions were examined based on keys principles, curriculum pathways and programmes, certification arrangements and transitions. Provision for young people, aged 15/16+ with mild to moderate or severe and profound GLD, was the focus of this desk study.

The range of jurisdictions examined included New Zealand, Queensland (Australia), New Brunswick (Canada), and Wales. The countries selected are English-speaking and have all adopted models of inclusive education to some degree. These jurisdictions were chosen to give a sense of the range of approaches used in other countries and to identify the similarities and differences present throughout.

New Zealand

Under the New Zealand (NZ) Disability Strategy, schools have binding obligations to provide a quality education for all learners (NZ Government, 2016). Schools are required to be inclusive as set out in the Education and Training Act 2020 (NZ Ministry of Education, 2022d), which states that all young people are entitled to attend and receive education in state schools. The Ministry of Education recommends that schools follow the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (NZ Ministry for Education, no date).

Learning support services are provided in mainstream schools for children and young people with SEN. Students with a 'Specialist Education Agreement', usually those with significant needs, may attend a specialist school (NZ Ministry of Education, 2022a).

Under the principle of inclusive education, the New Zealand curriculum and the associated qualifications framework, give schools the flexibility to design and deliver programmes to engage all students and offer them appropriate learning pathways (NZ Ministry of Education, 2022b). Consequently, students aged 16+ with SEN are entitled to follow pathways leading to the senior secondary qualification – the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), which is a flexible, credit-based qualification, available at three main levels (Level 3 being the highest level on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, usually achieved at around age 18 and equivalent to Level 5 on the NQF). It is designed to recognise achievement across a wide range of ability levels, and to enable all students to tailor their NCEA to their future needs, aspirations, skills, and abilities.

Students with a permanent or long-term sensory, physical, medical, or learning difficulty may be eligible for special assessment conditions (SAC) when completing the NCEA (NZ Qualifications Authority, no date). SAC aims to help students to fairly demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding when being assessed without providing an unfair advantage over other students.

Mainstream schools are also required to offer a curriculum which is based on the principles and eight learning areas of the New Zealand curriculum (NZ Ministry of Education, 2020). The learning

areas are English, the arts, health and physical education, languages, mathematics and statistics, science, social sciences, and technology (NZ Ministry of Education, 2015). The curriculum must also enable students with special needs to acquire the New Zealand Curriculum key competencies (thinking; relating to others; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; participating and contributing) (NZ Ministry of Education, 2020). This is with a view to increasing their ability to find employment when they leave education and to participate socially. Level 1 of the New Zealand curriculum is regarded as the starting point for all students.

Where their needs cannot be met by the regular curriculum, students in specialist schools may follow different pathways. For example, they may follow an individual functional curriculum, based on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). At senior secondary level, specialist schools may also provide programmes that focus on building essential life skills that are underpinned by employability skills (positive attitude, willingness to learn, communication, thinking skills, teamwork, resilience, self-management). Such programmes may lead to the New Zealand Certificate in Skills for Living for Supported Learners.

In addition to the Individual Education Plans, by the time they are 14, students with GLD are encouraged to develop, with their parents/carers and school, a transition plan (or Individual Career Plan (ICP)) (NZ Office for Disability Issues, 2022). The ICP documents their future plans and aspirations, lifelong development needs, and the support, skills, knowledge, courses etc., which will enable them to achieve their goals. To support the development of these plans, the Ministry of Education provides National Transition Guidelines (NZ Ministry of Education, 2019). Students and their schools are expected to develop a portfolio in their final two years of school (ages 16-18) to record the skills that they have developed, samples of their work and references from others.

Post-school (18+) opportunities for young people with GLD include work experience, integration into tertiary study, part-time employment, supported employment, or recreation and leisure activities. Schools are expected to work towards this by providing opportunities for pupils to participate in relevant integration activities during their final two years of school (NZ Office for Disability Issues, 2022).

Queensland, Australia

In Queensland, Australia, provision for students with SEN is guided by the Every Student with Disability Succeeding Plan (Queensland Government, 2022a) and Queensland's Inclusive Education Policy (Queensland Government, 2021) which both focus on enabling students with SEN to access inclusive education.

Students who have physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, and neurological impairments or health support needs, are entitled to enroll at their local state school which must make reasonable adjustments so that students with SEN are able to access and participate in education (Queensland Government, 2021). Based on a reasonable adjustments resourcing (RAR) model being introduced during the period 2023-2025, funding is allocated to schools rather than individual students, and student needs are classified at one of five levels: support (students are supported through usual school processes, without drawing on additional resources), supplementary, substantial, extensive and extensive plus. Students who have a severe disability, including an intellectual disability, may enroll in a special school if it is judged unlikely that they

will attain the levels of development that they are capable of without such provision (Queensland Government, 2022b, 2022c).

The senior phase of education (Years 11-12, ages 16-18) aims to provide students with the opportunity to develop the skills, knowledge and abilities required to finish school; be active and informed citizens; continue their learning journey; and be engaged in the community (Queensland Government, 2022a). To prepare for the senior phase, all students, including students with SEN, in local state schools or state special schools, develop a Senior Education and Training (SET) plan which sets out learning goals for the senior phase (Queensland Government, 2022a). The SET is usually developed in Year 10 (age 15/16), but may be developed earlier for students with SEN. It is developed in consultation with the student's school and his/her parents or carers, and is structured around the student's abilities, interests and strengths and their ambitions for life after Year 12.

In Years 11 and 12, senior secondary students with SEN attending their local state school can follow a pathway towards the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) (Queensland Government, 2020). This is the main senior secondary qualification for which credits can be achieved in general/academic subjects, applied subjects or vocational and technical qualifications. Alternatively, these students can follow an individual learning programme leading to the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2018, 2022b). This is the programme most often followed by students with SEN in special schools.

The QCIA programme must be based on one or more of five curriculum organisers, as set out in the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) Guideline for Individual Learning (GIL) (QCAA), 2022a). The five organisers are:

- Communication and technologies
- Community, citizenship, and the environment
- Leisure and recreation
- Personal and living dimensions
- Vocational and transition activities.

Teachers use the GIL to identify the relevant curriculum organisers for each individual student. For each curriculum organiser, teachers select learning focuses suited to the student's needs and interests, and the learning goals associated with each learning focus. Schools then collect evidence of the student's learning and participation throughout Years 11 and 12 and record the information on a student's QCIA. The QCIA confirms that students have completed at least 12 years of education and provides a summary of their skills and knowledge. Students can present their QCIA to employers and training providers.

Students who are following an individual learning programme towards the QCIA may also complete additional studies which provide credits towards the QCE (QCAA, 2022b. This learning cannot be duplicated on the student's QCIA, nor can students achieve both the QCIA and the QCE. However, any QCE credits students achieve can be recorded on their Senior Statement (a transcript of the learning undertaken by all students completing Year 12 at a Queensland school)

and registered in their learning account. Students may then continue to work towards the QCE after leaving school, as credits already achieved remain live for up to nine years.

Post-school (18+) opportunities for young people with disabilities in Queensland include employment options such as volunteering or open and supported employment, further education and training options, adult community education, or community participation and engagement (Queensland Government Department of Education, no date).

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) offers eligible students who are finishing school up to two years of support through School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) (Australian Government Department of Education, 2020). The individual programmes of supports can include money handling skills, time management skills, communication skills, discovery activities, work experience, job-ready skills, travel skills, and personal development skills. The National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) programme provides young people with advice about post-school options, and also supports transition by connecting young people with those who can help with further study, training and employment.

New Brunswick, Canada

In New Brunswick, Canada, Policy 322 of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), requires New Brunswick schools to be inclusive (New Brunswick DEECD, 2021a). Students with SEN must generally not be placed in segregated, self-contained programmes or classes. The education system aims to meet student needs by providing the curriculum equitably to all students in an 'inclusive common learning environment', based on the principles of UDL (New Brunswick DEECD, no date). This learning environment should be physically accessible to all students and offer teaching and learning in groups appropriate to the students' age and grade (year group).

Teaching and learning are based on learning outcomes and instruction and assessment being designed to meet the needs, strengths, best interests and learning styles of each individual student. The focus is on promoting social cohesion, belonging, active participation in learning, and positive interactions with those in the school community.

In instances where a local school cannot provide for a student's learning outcomes in an inclusive environment, the school along with the Education Support Services, parents, carers, and students must develop a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) (New Brunswick DEECD, 2015b). The PLP is based on the strengths, learning preferences and needs of the student and must be based on the prescribed mainstream curriculum to the greatest extent appropriate for the student (ibid.). It contains personalised goals and identifies teaching strategies and methods of evaluation. Guidelines and standards from the DEECD set out a consistent, standardised method for the development and application of PLPs.

Where possible, senior cycle pathways are expected to enable students with special needs to achieve the New Brunswick high school diploma (New Brunswick DEECD, 2022). This is a four-year, credit-based programme, with credits achieved from compulsory and optional subjects. Most credits towards graduation requirements are achieved in Grades 11 and 12 (ages 16-18), but students are expected to achieve the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) in Grade 9 (age 14-15). Students who have yet to achieve the ELPA in Grade 9 can be reassessed in

Grades 11 and 12. Schools may also apply for a student to be exempted from the ELPA high school diploma requirement if the student is following a modified/adjusted or individualised curriculum in English.

Students with GLD may receive curriculum and assessment accommodations to enable them to achieve the high school diploma (New Brunswick DEECD, 2015, 2022b). Accommodations can include assistive technologies such as screen readers or other adjustments without which a learner would not be able to access the curriculum.

Students may also follow a modified or adjusted curriculum/programme, or an individualszed programme, to enable them to achieve the diploma (New Brunswick DEECD, 2015b). This, too, will be reflected in the students' PLP. Modified/ adjusted programmes alter the depth of comprehension of the prescribed curriculum outcomes. Individualised programmes are developed to support students' skills development and can include goals relating to academic and study skills, social skills, communication, behavioural and functional/motor skills, socio-emotional and coping skills, or personal care skills. Throughout high school, students with a PLP must receive formal progress reports, which provide a record of their progress at the same time as all other students.

Students who receive the New Brunswick High School Diploma receive a high school transcript. Curriculum accommodations made do not show on the diploma or the transcript. If a student followed a modified/adjusted curriculum, this must be indicated on the transcript, but not on the diploma.

The Essential Skills Achievement Pathway (ESAP) is an alternative high school diploma programme available to all students (New Brunswick DEECD, no date). This offers students an opportunity to earn a diploma that prepares them for post-secondary education, an apprenticeship, or the world of work. It consists of 25 personalised learning opportunities that allow students to explore their skills, talents, abilities, and interests. It allows students attain New Brunswick's nine identified essential skills: reading, writing, numeracy, oral communication, document use, computer use, thinking skills, continuous learning, and working with others. The workplace entry pathway includes a work placement requirement of a minimum of 400 hours.

Planning for the transition of students from senior cycle to adult life is expected to begin by the Spring of Grade 8 (aged 13-14). In the final two years of senior cycle education (aged 16-18), outside agencies, community activity organisers and post-secondary institutions are involved in transition planning alongside the student and his or her parents/guardians and teachers.

A review of New Brunswick's model recommended making information about the reality and needs of the labour market accessible to students. It also recommended prioritizing experiential learning (New Brunswick DEECD, 2021b; CBC News, 2020).

Wales

The support given to children and young people aged 0 to 25 years who have additional learning needs (ALN) and who are receiving education and/or training, is guided by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 (Welsh Government, 2021b). The system aims to enable the majority of children and

young people with ALN to participate fully in mainstream education, and to be given opportunities to achieve their full potential through access to an education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit from, and enjoy learning.

The 2018 Act introduced individual development plans (IDP) for all children and young people with ALN, regardless of the severity or complexity of their learning difficulty or disability (Welsh Government, 2018). The IDP contains a description of a student's ALN and of the Additional Learning Provision (ALP) that is required because of his/her GLD. Such provision is defined as education or training provision that is additional to, or different from, that provided for other students of the same age. It can take the shape of school-based provision delivered by staff working in the school such as teachers, teaching assistants, and tutors, or as targeted provision delivered by specialist staff such as speech and language therapists.

In some circumstances, ALP support may be provided in specialist settings outside of a mainstream school or further education (FE) institution. Where young people are not in mainstream education, they are expected to have links to their peers in mainstream provision (Welsh Government, 2016).

The curriculum for Wales (ages 3-16) has been developed to be inclusive of all learners and is intended to support schools to design inclusive school curricula and to enable learners to progress along the same continuum of learning at a pace that suits them (Welsh Government, 2016). The seven Areas of and Experience are expressive arts, health and well-being, humanities, languages, literacy and communication, mathematics and numeracy, science, and technology.

From age 16, students with ALN are expected to be supported to access a curriculum and qualifications appropriate to their needs. This may be a pathway towards A Level qualifications or towards the Welsh Baccalaureate, which his is a specified combination of qualifications, available at one of three levels; Foundation, National or Advanced, and is intended to prepare students between the ages of 14 and 19 for employability, further study and life (Welsh Government, 2022b). Programmes might also involve young people studying for GCSE qualifications (usually taken at around age 16), following pathways towards a range of vocational qualifications, or taking Essential Skills Wales qualifications.

Assessment for all qualifications for young people must be made accessible to those with particular requirements, without compromising achievement at the required standard. Centres are expected to use initial assessment to identify any necessary individual support or adjustments needed.

Learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) often follow the Routes for Learning materials (Welsh Government, 2020a, 2021a. The Routes for Learning Routemap provides guidance to help practitioners to assess learners with PMLD and identify how best to support them (Welsh Government, 2020b). They focus on three key learning priorities:

- Early cognitive development
- Communication and social interaction skills
- Interaction with the environment (ibid.).

A student's individual development plan includes information to support the transition(s), such as details of the transition(s) expected to be made; identification of any individual responsible for coordinating transition arrangements; the agreed actions of the professionals and/or agencies involved in supporting transition; and the objectives and outcomes the transition is intended to support (Welsh Government, 2020b). Transition planning is intended to help with the emotional and practical challenges ahead, and to include discussion, as part of the final transition plan, around what happens when a young person's IDP ends, and what support is available to them in their next stage in life. This planning aims to support individuals to reach their potential and live independent, fulfilled lives.

Section summary

In New Zealand, Queensland (Australia), New Brunswick (Canada) and Wales, students with GLD are educated in mainstream settings where possible. Some students with more severe and profound disabilities are educated in special schools. Teaching, learning and assessment in these jurisdictions recognise the need to consider the complex needs of students with SEN.

The section highlighted a focus on facilitating the inclusion of students with GLD in upper-secondary mainstream education pathways, and on maximising their opportunity to access the mainstream curriculum and qualifications in place across the jurisdictions. This is supported by curriculum and course accommodations. Where students are in separate, specialist provision, there are also general expectations that the pathways they follow will include links with their peers in mainstream provision. Across all jurisdictions, timing is considered important and planning for the transition into upper secondary and beyond starts well before the students move from lower to upper secondary.

Students' senior cycle pathways are tailored, recorded, and reviewed in individual plans which guide learning. Records of student achievement are considered an important support for student transitions to life after school, as are transition plans. These plans for learning and transition centre on individual interests, learning styles, strengths, skills, needs and ambitions for the future. They commonly include consideration of the development of life skills, behavioural and coping skills, communication skills, academic/study skills, functional skills, and employability skills. In upper secondary school, there can also be a focus on connections outside of the education system, for example, on community participation, workplace experience and experiential learning, to provide students with the foundations for life after senior cycle.

5. Issues for consideration

This section sets out a number of issues for consideration in the development of senior cycle modules for students progressing from L1LPs and L2LPs. These issues arise from the nature of the junior cycle learning programmes from which the students are transitioning and draw on themes emerging in the preceding sections of this background paper.

Target group and criteria for accessing the modules

L1LPs and L2LPs target a small group of students in junior cycle with very specific learning needs. Throughout the development process of follow-on modules in senior cycle, it will be essential to remain cognisant of the target group of students for these modules to ensure that they have access to, can participate in and benefit from an appropriate senior cycle curriculum. Feedback from the review of L1LPs and L2LPs in junior cycle would indicate that it will be necessary to consider how best to clarify and communicate, to all stakeholders, the criteria for accessing these modules in senior cycle.

Continuity and progression

The development process will need to consider how the knowledge, understanding and skills developed at junior cycle across the PLUs and short courses can be consolidated and progressed in senior cycle and transferred beyond school, and how the individual needs of students can be addressed. Insights gained from the review of L1LPs and L2LPs indicate that it is necessary for the modules to build on the learning in the PLUs; be student-centred and age-, peer- and learning-needs appropriate; and contribute to students' intellectual, social, and personal growth and maturity.

Additionally, it is opportune to consider other areas of learning that may not have been addressed, heretofore, in the L1LPs and L2LPs for the senior cycle modules. It is important to reflect that the developmental and social needs of all students change as they get older, and the follow-on modules should address this development. Key to supporting the transition of students from junior cycle into senior cycle will be appropriate planning and consideration should be given to how best to support this planning process.

Alignment with the NFQ

The curricular components that comprise L1LPs are aligned with the learning indicators at Level 1 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Similarly, for L2LPs, the learning outcomes for each PLU and short course are broadly aligned with the level indicators for Level 2 of the NFQ. In the context of follow-on modules in senior cycle, consideration will be required of the level indicator(s) of the NFQ to which the learning outcomes for these follow-on modules should be broadly aligned.

Guidelines for schools and teachers

In the absence of a Framework for Senior Cycle, it will be important to consider the nature and scope of the guidelines that will be required, particularly in the initial enactment phase, to assist teachers in any setting in designing learning programmes to meet the specific needs of the students in question.

An integrated senior cycle

The development of follow-on modules will have to consider the guiding principles for a redeveloped senior cycle to ensure the realisation of the overall purpose and vision of senior cycle. Furthermore, consideration will need to be given to the extent to which it is envisaged that the students accessing these modules who are in mainstream settings will undertake their learning in mainstream classes.

Currently at senior cycle, work is underway to revise the TY Programme Statement in parallel to the development of these modules. Careful consideration will be required to explore the potential for integration of these modules into a revised TY programme in a school.

Consideration will also need to be given to ensuring that significant and important flexibility is provided to accommodate students who choose to do a 2-year or a 3-year senior cycle.

Assessment, reporting and certification

The development of follow-on modules will require extensive deliberation on the most appropriate assessment, reporting and certification arrangements. Insights from the review of L1LPs and L2LPs highlighted that ongoing assessment was most appropriate for these cohorts of students, and parents, teachers and stakeholders recognised the importance and value for all students receiving certification at the same time regardless of the level at which they were accessing the curriculum.

In addition to identifying the features and requirements of these modules for certification, it will also be necessary to consider the mechanism for reporting and certification.

Diverse pathways and transitions

Supporting students to plan for and transition to life after school and a range of diverse futures is an important feature of senior cycle. While independence means different things for different students, it is important for all. Consideration will need to be given to how modules could be designed to help students develop skills for the workplace, further/higher education, vocational education, community participation and/or adult services.

Professional development and inclusive practices

Recent research suggests a lack of confidence among pre service teachers in their knowledge and ability to implement inclusive practices in schools and a desire for more support in this area (NCSE, 2017). This was echoed in the findings from the early enactment review of the L1LPs and L2LPs, particularly where many mainstream teachers indicated they lacked confidence in teaching students with more complex learning needs. While the Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning

(Teaching Council 2016b) identified 'inclusion' as one of its priority learning areas, it does not overtly recommend any specific standards or competencies in inclusive education. The provision and funding of more tailored CPD for teachers would have a positive impact on teaching and learning for this cohort of students.

6. Brief for the Post-primary Special Education Development Group

NCCA recently established a Post-primary Special Education Development Group to undertake, in the first instance, the task of developing a series of modules for students in senior cycle who follow L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle. The group will also provide support for curriculum review and development related to the junior cycle L1LPs and L2LPs. The work of the Development Group is, in general terms, agreed by the NCCA Board for Senior Cycle and by the Council in the form of the brief set out below.

The modules will be developed to support the realisation of the purpose and vision for a redeveloped senior cycle as set out the Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report (NCCA, 2022). The guiding principles, as described in the Advisory Report, provide a touchstone for the Development Group as they undertake the task of preparing this series of modules at senior cycle.

The modules will be student-centred and age-, peer- and learning-needs appropriate and contribute to students' intellectual, social, and personal growth and maturity. The level of the National Framework of Qualifications, to which the modules would be aligned, might vary as appropriate.

The design of the modules will be informed by research, an important part of which is the research being conducted by NCCA on the nature and design of curriculum specifications for the senior cycle stage of education. The development group will advise on the most appropriate time allocation for the modules.

Modules will be completed for Autumn 2024.

More specifically, the development of the modules will address:

- How the modules align with the guiding principles of senior cycle and how they can be integrated across a redeveloped senior cycle.
- How the modules can support continuity and progression, including how to connect with and build on related learning at junior cycle and in other senior cycle subjects and modules, as well as future learning in life, study, entrepreneurship, further education and training, higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, and the world of work.
- How the modules can support students in developing life skills and contribute to the students' intellectual, social, and personal growth and maturity.
- How the modules can support the development of students' communication, literacy, and numeracy skills.
- How the modules can support students in developing positive relationships with others in their community, whether that community is their family, school, or the wider community in which they live.

- How the modules can enable students to take as much control as possible of their personal care and wellbeing.
- How to provide multiple, diverse, and appropriate opportunities for students to achieve and demonstrate their learning.
- The scope and form of reporting, recognising as appropriate the full range of achievement and experiences.
- How achievement can be certified.
- How the modules, in their presentation and language register, can be strongly student-centred and have a clear focus on how students develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, values and dispositions.
- How the modules, in their presentation, can support teachers in planning for teaching, learning and assessment, including how a focus on developing a range of relevant skills might be fostered.
- How to embrace and embed technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

The work of the Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In carrying out its task, the Development Group will also be asked to:

- Consider the findings of the Early Enactment Review of the Junior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes.
- Contribute to the review and development of PLUs and short courses at junior cycle as required.
- Identify necessary supports and resources for the successful enactment of the curriculum, e.g., examples of pedagogical strategies, case studies, sample L1LPs and L2LPs, collaboration with teacher support services etc.

During the Development Group's work and deliberations, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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