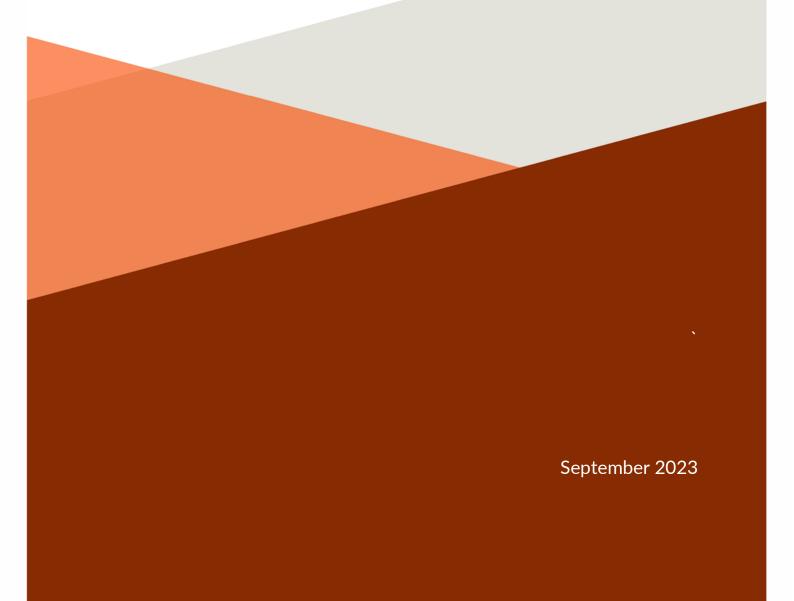# Consultation Report on the Background Paper and Brief for the development of follow-on modules for students following Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes

September 2023

Contents

Introduction

The [Background Paper and Brief for the development of follow-on modules for students following Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes](#) was approved for consultation by Council on February 9th, 2023, and the public consultation ran from March 8th to April 28th, 2023.

The Background Paper provides an overview of the current context in which the development of follow-on modules is taking place, including consideration of relevant policy developments within special education. It looks at existing curriculum provision for students with General Learning Disabilities (GLD) as well as including a summary of the findings from the recent [review of the Junior Cycle Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes](#). The paper includes a section on international trends on pathways for students with general learning disabilities, before concluding with issues which were identified for consideration in the development of follow-on modules at senior cycle. Finally, it sets out the brief for the development of these modules.

The aim of the consultation on the Background Paper and Brief was to seek the views of interested parties in relation to the ideas and issues set out to inform the work of the Post-Primary Special Educational Needs Development Group.

This report on the consultation presents an overview of the consultation process, followed by a summary of the feedback received, and explores key findings from the consultation for the work of the Development Group as they progress their deliberations.

Section One: Consultation process

Consultation is a key aspect of NCCA's work, where advice is shaped by feedback from consultations with the public, schools, settings, education interests and others (NCCA, 2022b). The following section presents an overview of the methodological approach employed during this consultation which is underpinned by the principles set out in NCCA's Research Strategy (2019) and provides a summary of engagement during the consultation.

Methodological approach

The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief included multiple modes of engagement during the consultation process:

- An online survey
- Written submissions
- Regional focus group sessions.

A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey, written submissions, and regional focus group sessions. The survey and written submissions facilitated the collection of data from a wide cross-section of respondents, while the face-to-face events supported more extensive and in-depth discussion and exploration of the issues for consideration.

Data gathered through focus groups was anonymised and transcribed, and all data from the consultation was stored as digital files in line with NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2020). The privacy of all participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation.

A thematic approach was used for data analysis and was framed by the issues for consideration set out in Section 5 (pp. 28-30) of the Background Paper. This helped to identify and analyse themes within the data gathered. The findings of this analysis are presented in Section Two of this report.

Consultation responses

Three regional focus groups were held with one session in Dublin, one in Cork and one in Mayo. 31 participants took part in these focus groups, with 5 principals/deputy principals, 23 teachers, 2 Special Education co-ordinators and 1 representative from NABMSE attending.

69 responses were received through the online survey with 13 schools (listed in Appendix A) requesting to be identified. An overview of the online survey respondents is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overview of online survey responses – *I am responding as a (you may choose more than one option)*

Ten written submissions were received from interested parties and organisations which are listed in Appendix A.

Section Two: Feedback from the consultation

This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The consultation focused on exploring the following issues for consideration as outlined the [Background Paper](#) (pp.28-30):

- Target group and criteria for accessing the modules
- Continuity and progression
- National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
- Guidelines for schools and teachers
- An integrated senior cycle
- Assessment, reporting and certification
- Diverse pathways and transitions
- Professional development and inclusive practices.

Other areas which were not directly consulted upon, but which were frequently raised by participants during the consultation, are also presented in this section of the report.

Target group and criteria for accessing the modules

Overall, participants expressed the view that follow-on modules at senior cycle should address the individual educational needs of students progressing from Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) or Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) at junior cycle.

While many participants identified that the criteria for accessing follow-on modules at senior cycle should be based on completing L1LPs or L2LPs at junior cycle, some expressed the view that this should be complemented by a more comprehensive individualised approach. To this end participants identified the need to consider other specific criteria, such as cognitive ability, attainment, and student ability within the ranges of Mild, Moderate, Severe and Profound General Learning Disabilities (GLD). Participants also highlighted the importance of meaningful discussions taking place at school level with the student, the student's teachers, special education teachers, school leaders, parent(s)/guardian(s), and other professionals, as appropriate, to take into consideration: information gathered through a range of assessments; the student's achievements to date; and the student's current and future educational needs.

Some participants were of the view that there is a perceived over-reliance on the results of cognitive ability tests as the main criteria for accessing L1LPs/L2LPs at junior cycle, and these participants supported a more individualised approach for accessing the programmes at junior cycle and into future senior cycle programmes.

> *I absolutely disagree that IQ should be the only criteria for accessing the Level2 programme for Junior Cycle students and therefore the follow up module in senior cycle. The criteria should be that professional teachers agree that this student will not pass Level 3 JC exams* (Post primary SET online survey)

Moreover, participants strongly emphasised the need for greater clarity and support identifying students' needs to enable them to access the most appropriate programmes at junior and senior cycle. Feedback indicates that there is evidence of ongoing confusion in the system regarding the identification of students whose needs are best suited to accessing L1LPs and L2LPs, and this confusion extends to the proposed follow-on modules at senior cycle. This was also reiterated in feedback from the review of the Level 1 and Level 2 Learning Programmes (NCCA, 2023a), particularly in mainstream schools providing L2LPs.

> *Too many students are being directed to Level 1/Level 2 because schools don't know what to do with them.* (SET Co-ordinator Mainstream, Focus group:)

> *A clear, robust identification process, in line with the process schools use for the Continuum of Support would benefit schools in identifying the students who should engage with these modules and help to ensure only students within the target group engage.* (Junior Cycle for Techers, written submission)

While many participants outlined the importance of some flexibility in terms of accessing follow-on modules at senior cycle, participants also spoke of the importance of providing guidance which prevents students being directed towards these modules who should be accessing other senior cycle subjects and modules in a redeveloped senior cycle.

> *Guidance needs to be provided on who should not be accessing these modules to ensure that learners, especially most of those with a Mild GLD or perhaps learners with behavioural difficulties are NOT inappropriately encouraged to participate in these modules.* (Dublin City University School of Inclusive and Special Education, written submission)

Continuity and progression

Participants indicated a desire for a senior cycle programme that ensures continuity and progression for students from the L1LPs and L2LPs. Most participants reflected that *extending* or *stretching* the learning at junior cycle would be helpful in consolidating and progressing learning.

> *The L2LPs have enough flexibility to engage learners through a variety of subjects, and I think the senior cycle should maintain a similar base so that learning can be flexible and relevant to senior students.* (Principal/Deputy Principal Special school, online survey)

It was highlighted, however, that for the age and developmental stage of students, many areas of learning needed to evolve. The areas of learning that were suggested as requiring more attention at senior cycle included digital literacy skills, and Social Personal Health Education (SPHE)/Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), functional living skills, financial education, environmental education, citizenship education and managing food and home. Additionally, learning how to use digital technology to support everyday living was consistently mentioned across the consultation and it was suggested that employing digital technologies in the classroom as a tool for learning is important.

In line with the Digital Strategy for schools and also in recognition of the role digital technology plays in society and our lives today, it would be beneficial to see senior cycle modules focusing more on developing digital skills. Digital technology can support accessibility in all areas of life and recognising and supporting students to develop their learning in this area would be a very positive approach. (Junior Cycle for Teachers, written submission)

Participants indicated that the provision of *choice and flexibility* was essential in ensuring that a student reaches their potential. By choice, participants described how the provision of a variety of modules would be helpful in enabling students to choose those that are most relevant, meaningful, and interesting for them. By flexibility, participants spoke about the removal of ring-fencing or one-track programmes that prohibited students from choosing modules at the most appropriate level for their ability.

Junior Cycle currently allows students to engage in a flexible, personalised programme of learning across 3 Levels, modules for senior cycle should also support this flexibility across levels. This flexibility ensures students can access curriculum, which is appropriate to their individual strengths and needs, (Junior Cycle for Teachers, written submission)

The *layout of the Junior Cycle Programmes works well for both students and teachers and a similar system of modules /Priority Learning Units, and some degree of option or choice built in too.* (Post-primary teacher/SET teacher/SET Coordinator, online survey)

In relation to continuity and progression, several participants highlighted the existing Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. There were conflicting views on LCA as a progression pathway for students following L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle. The LCA programme was introduced in 1995 as a pre-vocational programme at Level 4-5 of the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ). In recent years some students progressing from L2LPs, in the absence of a recognised path of progression at senior cycle, have progressed to the LCA. While LCA was not developed as an intended progression pathway for students who previously completed L1LPs/L2LPs at junior cycle, some participants considered it an appropriate pathway.

There already exists a suitable programme, it's called LCA. (Post-primary teacher, online survey)

Other participants acknowledged that LCA is not the intended pathway and outlined concerns that students who have completed L1LPs/L2LPs at junior cycle would find many elements of the LCA programme too difficult and as such, it is not the ideal progression pathway for many students. These participants called for the development of follow-on modules that would be more developmentally stage and age appropriate.

There are elements of the LCA programme that many participants indicated as worthy of consideration in the development of follow-on modules, such as: work experience, group work, project work and student interviews.

Helping to plan for the student's transition from senior cycle into work, further education, adult services, or other pathways was considered important across the consultation.

Transitioning out of school needs to be dealt with – it is crucial for students to have a route map out of school – this will look very different for Level 1 and Level 2. This should be a part of what the Senior Cycle SEN modules are about. (Special School Teacher, focus group)

However, some participants suggested that while an emphasis on life after school is important, it is imperative that students' current needs are equally prioritised. For this stage of education, it was viewed as essential that students feel welcome in school, feel a sense of belonging, have fun, engage with peers, and cultivate positive relationships.

In relation to HSE-supported adult services, it was suggested that there needs to be clearer lines of communication and support between schools and such services to ensure a smooth transition for the student.

School leaving for students who may be candidates for these modules generally indicates an end to formal learning opportunities. While some may secure rehabilitative training, adult day services tend to focus on care. These modules could inform assessment for progression after leaving school to [adult day] services but for any certification at senior cycle to be meaningful there would need to be greater clarity on what learning happens in these HSE-funded services. (Carrigaline Community Special School, written submission)

National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ)

There was a strong desire amongst consultation participants for the follow-on modules to lead to a qualification that is included within the NFQ to ensure that students get recognition for their work and achievements.

Credit should also be given to the student as they progress towards the level indicator. Credit should be given to the process of getting there as well as the end product or level. (Post-primary SET teacher/L1/L2LPs Coordinator, online survey)

However, participants also acknowledged challenges associated with including follow-on modules on the NFQ. It was frequently noted that a student's progression can be lateral as opposed to up the levels of the NFQ.

Where should these modules be included in the NFQ, because a student that has achieved Level 1 doesn't mean they can progress to Level 2. So, its problematic where this should fit on the NFQ (Special class teacher, focus group)

While most participants were of the view that follow-on modules tailored to the needs of students studying L1LPs and L2LPs should be developed, a number of participants referenced the modules already available on the NFQ at Level 1 and Level 2 with some questioning if there is a

need to develop further modules. Currently, QQI-developed modules are available on the NFQ at Level 1 and Level 2, which are designed to meet the needs of learners, both young and old, including those with intellectual and other disabilities, adults returning to training, and learners with few or no previous qualifications, including those within the workforce. These awards provide certification for learners who may progress to higher levels and for those whose principal achievements rest at these levels. Each certificate comprises several components, most often in basic literacy and numeracy (NQAI, 2009). While participants recognised the benefits of providing follow-on modules in schools from the L1LPs and L2LPs, they also signalled the importance of being cognisant of other modules available to students at this stage of education. Some participants recognised that the target group for these QQI certificates is very broad in terms of age and experience.

The importance of national certification for all students' educational achievements at senior cycle was consistently raised across all participants, and it was indicated that including the modules on the NFQ provides a means for ensuring parity of esteem in terms of participation and recognition in senior cycle education.

> *The follow-on modules should be aligned to NFQ very closely as then it gives national certification which is hugely important and can be used to progress to college and NALA, rehab etc. It also gives proper credence to the certification.*
> (Post-primary L1LPs/L2LPs Co-Ordinator, online survey)

Guidelines for schools and teachers

Across the consultation, participants identified features that they found helpful when using guidelines. These features included: clear and consistent language and messaging; and signposting connections with other SEN-related and/or subject-related documentation such as circulars, other guidelines and inspection reports. In addition, participants identified a need for guidelines to be succinct and easy to follow, interactive to enable the pertinent information to be easy-to-find, and applicable to all school settings and contexts.

Participants expressed the view that guidelines relating to senior cycle follow-on modules, which would include guidance on teaching students with special or additional needs, should be provided for all staff and not just those working in special education. It was noted that this would help to ensure an inclusive whole school approach to teaching and learning.

Throughout the consultation, some recommendations were offered regarding what teachers considered useful and meaningful information to be included in guidelines. These included guidance on:
- Effective pedagogies
- Assessment
- Differentiation
- Cross-curricular links
- How to support teacher collaboration.

An integrated senior cycle

Mixed views were expressed in relation to the concept of an integrated senior cycle. While many participants indicated the importance of students accessing quality senior cycle education, there were mixed perspectives on how best to provide for their individual needs.

The starting place for considering how all citizens can belong and belong-equally at school is that every person has abilities and capacities that make being part-of the student body at all schools possible instead of automatically assuming some must be kept 'appropriately' apart-from. (Audrey Halpin, Assistant Professor of Inclusive Education, School of Human Development, Dublin City University, written submission)

It is hard to see how those who are undertaking Level 1 today could integrate with a programme that prepares others for high-end academic success in a meaningful way, other than to facilitate the co-location of students that could be passed off as "inclusion". (Carrigaline Community Special School, written submission)

On one hand, some participants reported a desire for the learning outlined in the modules to align, where possible, with other existing senior cycle programmes, subjects or modules in LCA, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Established (LCE). This was considered important in ensuring that students experience meaningful inclusion by undertaking their learning in mainstream classes alongside their peers. However, on the other hand, some participants also urged caution with that approach, recognising that there are some skills and knowledge which are very meaningful to these students and that time and space needs to be given in the curriculum to developing these skills and knowledge.

It was also noted that the current senior cycle programmes were viewed by some participants as overly academic and points-driven, and an overly academic approach would be detrimental to the learning experience for students choosing follow-on modules. Some participants expressed what they perceive to be challenges and concerns around the successful and meaningful inclusion of students progressing from L1LPs/L2LPs at junior cycle into existing senior cycle programmes, which are on Level 4-5 of the NFQ.

Participants also expressed mixed views on supporting students with identified needs in mainstream classes. Some participants indicated the belief that students with general learning disabilities are primarily the remit of the SET team and special class teachers, and that the level of need of many students who could potentially opt for follow-on modules may not be met in mainstream classes:

I think it will be impossible to fully integrate Level 2 students into the senior cycle mainstream class as the difference of what needs to be done cannot be managed by differentiation. (Post primary SET teacher, online survey)

Other participants outlined the view that follow-on modules could and should be designed and delivered within mainstream classes, ensuring students the opportunities to participate in classrooms in their communities and with their peers.

Overall, the program should be designed to provide the necessary support to help students succeed while also being inclusive and not leading to exclusion, stigmatisation, or undue separation of students. It should be flexible and designed around the needs of the students, with sufficient resources and support provided to both students and teachers, including additional support staff where required. It was acknowledged that effective provision of the modules within the mainstream class can be challenging for teachers, while also ensuring that they create a space where students feel meaningfully included (Educate Together, written submission)

Some participants questioned the effectiveness and the perceived lack of inclusiveness of the current provision at junior cycle through the Level 3 Junior Cycle subjects, the Level 3 Junior Cycle short courses, and the L1LPs and L2LPs. Believing that curriculum provision at senior cycle would likewise be provided at a number of NFQ levels, these participants were concerned about Ireland's obligations arising from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Article 24 relating to Education.

In relation to Transition Year (TY), the consultation revealed an almost unanimous view that there should not be an alternative TY curriculum for students progressing from JC L1LPs/L2LPs. Participants expressed the strong view that all students who opt to participate in TY should be enabled to do so in a fulsome and inclusive manner, without the provision of an alternative curriculum. Many participants outlined what they perceived as potential positives in TY for students who engaged with L1LPs/ L2LPs at junior cycle.

TY is an ideal setting for L1 and L2 students as they benefit greatly from a programme and activities that are delivered in an integrated setting. (Post primary Guidance Counsellor, online survey)

Transition Year is a great year for L1LP and L2LP students as there is less academic focus and more on personal development. again, curriculum aligned to the current TY programme with assistance, but TY is a great year for personal growth and trips and out of school activities that L1LP and L2LP can complete with support (Post primary SET Co-ordinator, online survey)

Many participants indicated that students who accessed L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle should have a right to experience TY in the same manner as all other students do. However, some participants outlined that due to the nature of TY and individual student need, TY may not always be suitable for all students.

[Doing TY] completely depends on the student. We have non-verbal students who have intimate care needs, who need verbal prompting to do everything and struggle in larger group settings - they are in 10min timers for activities - TY would be extremely difficult for these students. [...] It would have to be based in the individual

Assessment, reporting and certification

Many participants spoke about individualised approaches to assessment to ensure that the learning students experience is meaningfully assessed. Participants provided many examples of different types of assessment that could be considered, mentioning a blend of formative and summative assessments, various modes such as peer or individual assessment and methods such as project work and portfolios. Many participants expressed a preference for some of the features of the assessment arrangements in the existing LCA programme, such as: portfolios, key assignments, student interviews, and the accumulation of credits over 2 years of the programme.

Students could be assessed in a similar way to the LCA programme, completing task-based assessments which are examined and assessed by interview or by credit-based assignments. Students would also receive their certification at the same time as the Leaving Certificate results. (Special School Principal/Deputy Principal, online survey)

Across the consultation there was strong support for external validation of assessment results to certify the students' educational achievements and to provide parity of esteem with other senior cycle programmes.

In terms of quality assurance, there should be some kind of external examiner- this brings validity to what the school is doing. (Special school teacher, focus group)

It was evident that many participants regarded the teacher's role in assessment as gathering the evidence of learning, judging the student's work against assessment criteria, and recording and documenting the level of achievement. In fact, many identified the role of external validation as necessary to ensure that teachers are gathering quality evidence of learning that meets the level of achievement awarded.

The feedback showed a welcome for an exploration of how learning in the home and community could be assessed. Many participants remarked on the rich learning that takes place in these environments, where students demonstrate many functional living skills.

In relation to reporting, many participants noted that not all learning is recognised by a grade or descriptor. However, participants expressed the need for a broadening of reporting and certification at senior cycle which would benefit all students, not just those engaging in the modules.

Current reporting and certification at the end of senior cycle focuses on students' performance in State Examinations Commission examinations, while some students from the target group for the modules may engage in some examinations not all will. Therefore, it is important to develop alternative senior cycle reporting and certification processes and systems. (Junior Cycle for Teachers, written submission)

Diverse pathways and transitions

By and large participants expressed the view that follow-on modules should offer an educational experience to meet individual needs and prepare students for their future lives. Participants outlined the need for modules to support functional life skills, with many highlighting the importance of a community and real-life work experience. Participants identified meaningful work placements in the community, or the opportunity to visit places of work to prepare students for life after post-primary education.

> *Modules need to be taken out of the classroom and taught in a very practical in situ way.* (Post primary SET teacher, online survey)

Participants were also clear on the need for follow-on modules to support the development of independent life skills and autonomous decision-making skills to support future transition. As was reported in the review of the JC L1LPs and L2LPs, participants called for the JC L2 Priority Level Unit (PLU) 'Preparation for Work' and aspects of 'Living in the Community' PLU to be moved to senior cycle where it was seen as more appropriate to this age group and stage of education. Other participants offered greater insight into the development of specific modules to support diverse pathways and transitions.

> *A specific module on "Life after School "should be developed to support learners and their families in understanding the range of postschool options available to them (not just HSE day services), develop a profile of skills and areas for further development, understand their rights and funding allowances, understand schemes that are available to support access to Further and Higher Education. It should also include a significant amount and diverse range of work experiences* (Dublin City University School of Inclusive and Special Education, written submission)

Participants provided insights into the many ways in which modules could be designed to help students develop skills for the workplace, further/higher education, vocational education, community participation and/or adult services. These insights included:

- Individualised learning: content and assessment approaches tailored to specific needs, interests and strengths.

- Work-based/community-based learning: build in opportunities to experience authentic work-based learning, or community-based learning.

- Teamwork and peer learning: opportunity to experience collaboration through group projects and peer to peer learning.

- Career exploration: opportunity to explore career choices, through career assessment, work experience or on-the-job shadowing.

- Skills-based learning: opportunity to develop and master specific skills that are relevant to the student's progression pathway.

Professional development and inclusive practices

Across the consultation, participants consistently spoke about the importance of teacher and school leader professional development, and how the different dimensions of professional

development were necessary for the successful introduction of any new modules. Professional development for all subject teachers, special education teachers and school leaders in the implementation of the modules was seen as essential. Participants also called for initial teacher education to focus on JC L1LPs/L2LPs and follow-on modules at senior cycle to build capacity.

Participants called for greater clarity around role and responsibilities in the implementation of follow-on modules. Many participants highlighted a growing frustration that students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are seen as the remit of Special Education Teacher (SET) teacher and special class teachers. In some cases, participants conveyed that SET teams are under increased pressure in schools and much of this sentiment is captured in the quote below.

> *Our SET workforce is overstretched, overburdened with administration, under-resourced in terms of time and manpower, and most concerningly, under professionalised in terms of the numbers of such teachers with post graduate qualifications in SEN or autism-specific education.* (Joint Managerial Body, written submission)

Feedback highlighted a degree of ambiguity in relation to many areas of SEN provision, such as identifying, meeting, and monitoring individual need, the SET Allocation Model and the role of the subject teacher, evidence-based interventions, the Continuum of Support, and whole school SEN planning. Many participants suggested that all teachers and school leaders should be provided with professional development in special and inclusive education to ensure greater understanding and whole school support.

> *Anything that comes down – the message has to say that this needs to include ALL teachers including senior management. The message is not clear for mainstream teachers about their responsibility as SEN teachers.* (Post primary SET teacher, focus group))

> *ALL Teachers to attend. Not good enough that only a few understand or know about student with SEN. Any teacher that teaches students at senior cycle should attend! Whole school approach*! (Post primary special class teacher, online survey).

Participants also spoke about the need for approaches to collaborative professional learning and individual professional learning, the value in both school-based learning opportunities and those which are external to the school. Many participants identified a model of community of practice or cluster meetings as their preferred approach to professional development. The needs for professional development to be focused on pedagogies and allow for greater opportunities to collaborate with other teachers, outside agencies and support services, was emphasised in the feedback received.

> *We need training on specific areas of SEN as well as areas like team/co-teaching which could assist in helping deliver in the classroom. We need the opportunity to collaborate. This means clusters, community of practice, local schools coming together, special schools working with mainstream schools etc.* (Post primary SET Co-ordinator, focus group)

Participants in the consultation highlighted a range of additional supports that schools will need to support the implementation of the new modules, such as:

- Collaborative professional learning: to encourage and support teachers working together to share experiences, develop ideas, good practices and evaluate approaches to teaching and learning.

- Inclusive teaching approaches; support teachers to build capacity to use inclusive approaches, differentiated instruction, different models of co-teaching.

- More information and guidance on how to support students with GLD.

- Guidance on individualised assessment to establish current level of ability relating to core aspects of learning which are likely to be central to accessing the appropriate senior cycle curriculum to meet the needs of the student.

- Professional development for school leadership to build capacity to lead inclusive schools.

- Developing a supportive environment where teachers are free to take risks, try new approaches, evaluate and reflect on approaches to teaching and learning.

Feedback was unanimous in emphasising the importance of clear and consistent communication from all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the modules. Further analysis of the feedback indicates that there is a desire for increased access to professional development in the wider area of SEN and inclusive practices. Many participants emphasised the need for increased capacity in the system to keep pace with the demand for and opening of special classes. Some participants identified a need for further opportunities in initial teacher training to avail of professional development in inclusive practices at whole school and individual teacher levels to build capacity and confidence.

Other areas of discussion

There were other areas of feedback which were not directly consulted upon but were frequently raised during the consultation process by participants. These areas are listed below although it is beyond the scope or purpose of this report to elaborate on each area of feedback. The most prevalent areas are:

- The challenges of inclusive education: Many participants expressed views on the broader challenges of supporting inclusive education, particularly in mainstream post-primary settings. In general participants called for increased levels of provision, funding, and access to additional resources, including teachers with training in special education, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), appropriate physical environments, assistive technology, teaching resources.

- Special Needs Assistants: Participants, irrespective of their school setting, indicated the need to secure more Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). Many participants highlighted the introduction of follow-on modules will increase the day-to-day demand on SNAs. Some participants called for the introduction of Teaching Assistants, as the remit of an SNA is focused on the primary care needs of students. Participants expressed the view that the 'primary care need' definition limits the support that SNAs can provide, and it would be beneficial to have more support for the teaching and learning needs of the students.

- Special schools' designation as primary schools: Many participants spoke at length of the challenge for special schools to provide a broad and balanced post primary education while their designation as primary schools remains. Participants indicated that this designation has resulted in many special schools being unable to provide the range of post-primary curriculum choices that mainstream post-primary schools can provide, especially those subjects which require specialist rooms, equipment, and teachers. Some participants suggested that the staffing allocation for special schools should reflect the curricular needs of the students and is most likely to include both primary and post-primary qualified teachers. Furthermore, participants raised the issue that legally, while children with special educational needs have the right to free primary education up to age 18, students must leave their special school when they reach that age. Many participants described the practice as *unfair* and *discriminatory* and expressed a strong desire for this issue to be addressed in the context of the redevelopment of senior cycle.

Section Three: Key findings for the development of follow-on modules

The findings of the consultation indicate that the development of follow-on modules is necessary, timely and widely welcomed by the vast majority of participants, and that the Background Paper and Brief provides a comprehensive overview of the issues that will need to be considered by the development group. Furthermore, the consultation has also highlighted some findings that will require decisions to be made that are beyond the remit of NCCA to support the development of the modules. This section of the report identifies some of the key findings for the development of the follow-on modules arising from the consultation.

Whilst the feedback has been presented in this report through the lens of eight main themes, this section of the report presents the key findings under two headings:

- Key findings to be considered by the development group working on the modules.
- Key findings for wider stakeholders.

Key findings to be considered the development group working on the modules

Target group and criteria for accessing the follow-on modules
The development group will need to ensure that the criteria developed to identify students whose needs would be better served by accessing these modules, provide clarity for teachers, school leaders and parents.

Continuity and progression
The development group will need to reflect on the areas of learning from the L1LPs and L2LPs that merit consideration for continuity purposes. They will also need to consider how the learning can progress from junior cycle into senior cycle. For some students, consolidation of their knowledge and skills from junior cycle will be fundamental to their education. However, recognising the age and stage of students in senior cycle requires consideration of areas of learning including SPHE and RSE, citizenship education and financial education, among others.

Guidelines for schools and teachers
The development group will need to be mindful that any guidelines produced will need to support a whole school approach and use clear, concise and consistent language. Guidelines will also need to offer consistency in messaging, be interactive and applicable in all school settings and contexts.

An integrated senior cycle
The development group will need to consider the challenges of an integrated senior cycle and the extent to which the follow-on modules could be implemented in mainstream classrooms. The development of Key competencies in senior cycle provides an opportunity for the development group to consider how these broader learning goals can be made meaningful for all students thereby enabling an integrated learning experience.

Assessment and reporting

The development group will need to examine the most appropriate approaches to assessment to enable the individual student to best present their learning. Not all students will be able to engage with formal modes of assessment and therefore other forms of reporting may be required. Feedback from the consultation has suggested that formative assessment could be used to support learning in the community and home, as well as in school.

Feedback strongly indicated that broadening the parameters of reporting and certification is necessary, and how we can provide more rounded reporting and certification will be considered by the development group.

Diverse pathways and transitions

The development group will need to ensure that follow-on modules at senior cycle will offer students an educational experience that prepares them for life after post-primary education. Consideration will be needed on how these modules can support the development of independence, functional life skills and provide meaningful work placements in the community. The development group will also need to consider how follow-on modules will support the development of autonomous decision-making to support future transition and independent living.

Key findings for wider stakeholders

The findings set out below are reported for consideration by relevant stakeholders involved in the redevelopment of senior cycle.

National Framework of Qualifications

There is a strong desire for the modules to lead to a qualification that is included within the NFQ. If this is to be the case, a decision is needed as to who will be the awarding body required for consideration of the verification/validation of learning.

Assessment and certification

The importance of national certification for all students' educational achievements at senior cycle was consistently raised across all participants during the consultation. Significant deliberations will be required to identify how this can be realised in the context of a redeveloped senior cycle.

In addition, clarity is needed on the degree, if any, to which external validation of the assessment arrangements is required for the purposes of certification.

Professional development and inclusive practices

Teacher professional development was identified as pivotal to the successful implementation of follow-on modules at senior cycle. Consultation participants outlined a need for professional development in implementing the follow-on modules as well as in inclusive teaching methodologies and pedagogies.

Many participants specified a model of community of practice and/or cluster sessions for teachers to discuss and share examples of practice and experience in terms of implementing the modules. Participants, regardless of their school setting, identified a need for a whole school approach to work with other teachers to build capacity and confidence.

Also, there are broader concerns and challenges around inclusion in mainstream classrooms that merit further consideration by the relevant stakeholders.

Stakeholder collaboration

Feedback indicates the necessity for clear, consistent messaging and communication, from all stakeholders, such as Department of Education (DE), NCCA, National Council for Special Education (NCSE), National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), professional development services and others, on special education more generally, on the criteria for accessing L1LPs and L2LPs at junior cycle, and the broader areas of inclusive teaching and learning. The importance of making information widely available, easy-to-find, clear and consistent was repeatedly raised across participants in the consultation

Conclusion and next steps

The consultation on the Background Paper and Brief generated rich discussion and provided useful and thoughtful feedback from multiple perspectives. The quality of the responses to the consultation demonstrated significant engagement with the Background Paper and the thoughtful and considered opinions and suggestions offered indicate the extent to which the introduction and development of these modules is highly valued and supported by participants in the consultation.

NCCA would like to thank all of those who participated in focus groups, completed the online survey, or made a written submission. Furthermore, NCCA is grateful to the school leaders who facilitated teachers in participating in the focus group events.

This report has presented an overview of the range of views and perspectives across the consultation process. The findings presented in this report will provide direction and guidance for the development group as it continues its work and ensures that the modules are available for introduction in September 2024.

Finally, the consultation has identified a range of conducive conditions that will be critical to the successful enactment of these modules. This feedback will be shared with the relevant stakeholders involved in the redevelopment of senior cycle.

References

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National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2009). Referencing of the Irish NFQ to the EQF – National Report available at https://europa.eu/europass/system/files/2022-05/Irish_Referencing_Report%5B1%5D.pdf [accessed 24 May 2023]

Appendix A

As part of the consultation on the Background Paper and Brief the following schools/organisations requested to be identified as having responded to the online survey:

CBS, Roscommon.
De La Salle College, Macroom.
Ennis Community College.
Mullingar Community College.
Mungret Community College.
Scoil Chormaic Special School.
Scoil Mhuire, Kanturk.
Ratoath College.
St. Aidan's Community College.
St. Ita's School.
St. Oliver's Community College.
St. Michael's Special School.
Sutton Park School.

During the consultation 10 written submissions were received from the following groups and organisations:

Carrigaline Community Special School
Dublin City University School of Inclusive and Special Education
Educate Together
Audrey Halpin, Assistant Professor of Inclusive Education, School of Human Development, Dublin City University
Junior Cycle for Teachers L1LP/L2LP Team
Joint Managerial Body
Knockbeg College
Mountmellick Community School
National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
St. Michaels Special School