Professional Development for Teachers Working in Special Education/Inclusion in Mainstream Schools: The Views of Teachers and Other Stakeholders

A Research Report Part Funded by the National Council for Special Education, Special Education Research Initiative

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Inclusion; special education; professional development; reflective/resilient teacher.

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Elizabeth O'Gorman Professor Sheelagh Drudy

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Abbreviations Used

Abbreviation used Explanation

CPD Continuing professional development

DES Department of Education and Science

EPSEN Act Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act

IATSE Irish Association of Teachers of Special Education

ICDU In-career development unit

IEP Individual education plan

ILSA Irish Learning Support Association

ITE Initial teacher education

LS Learning support

LS/R Learning support/resource (teacher)

NAPD National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

NCSE National Council for Special Education

NEPS National Educational Psychological Service

NQT Newly qualified teacher

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

State Examination Commission

Ofsted Office for Standards in Education Department (UK)
RACE Reasonable accommodations in certificate exams

SEN Special educational need

SEC

SENCO Special educational needs co-ordinator

SENO Special educational needs organiser

SESS Special Education Support Service

SLSS Second Level Support Service

SMT Senior management team

SNA Special needs assistant

TES Teacher education section

UCD University College Dublin

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Executive Summary

The main objective of this research was to identify the professional development requirements of learning support/resource (LS/R) teachers working with children with disabilities and/or special educational needs in mainstream schools. These requirements were identified through research conducted with key stakeholders associated with the field of special education and through a review of current literature pertinent to the area.

Background

The international research shows the importance of teacher education in effecting change and moving to more inclusive systems. The international evidence on the LS/R teachers' role shows some broad patterns emerging. First, the workload is both complex and heavy and has a tendency to burgeon incrementally. Second, the importance of whole-school involvement is emphasised. Third, the need to assert the leadership role of the special educational needs co-ordinator has been heavily emphasised, as has the importance of aligning it to management and the senior management teams in schools. The importance of flexibility in the definition of the role has been emphasised, not least to take account of variations in school and national cultures. In general, previous research on the professional needs, roles and responsibilities of teachers with responsibility for special educational needs showed that professional development which was longer in duration, regular, structured, collaborative and embedded in practice was more effective. The evidence shows that the education and support of children with special needs demands highly educated, skilled, and professionally autonomous and committed teachers who can adapt teaching and curricula to the needs and resources of pupils with learning and other difficulties, and for school leaders who are change agents in the development of their schools. Thus, previous research illustrated that teacher education and continuing professional development are at the core of the development of more inclusive educational systems.

Methodology

The project utilised a mixed-methods approach. Questionnaires were sent to all post-primary schools and to a sample of primary schools in Ireland. Responses were received from 196 primary school principals and 212 post-primary principals, and from 417 primary and 399 post-primary LS/SEN teachers, yielding information on 816 schools.

The schools which responded represented almost a quarter of a million pupils with the approximate number of primary pupils represented amounting to just under 62,000 and post-primary pupils amounting to over 177,000. There were responses from schools in every county in the Republic of Ireland and analysis proved the sample reflected the whole population relatively accurately. Interviews were held with a sub-sample of the responding teachers and with other stakeholders.

Findings

The learning environment

- Some 10 per cent of schools reported having special classes, with a higher percentage at primary level. Some 94 per cent of primary, and an equal percentage of post-primary, respondents reported that there was at least one full-time LS/R teacher on their staff. Primary teachers indicated higher numbers of LS/R teachers on their staffs. Just 73 per cent of the primary, but 91 per cent of the post-primary, teachers reported having a SEN co-ordinator on the staff. A low proportion of primary respondents (44 per cent) indicated the existence of a SEN team in the school, but the proportion reporting a SEN team at post-primary level was almost double at 82 per cent. Larger schools and disadvantaged schools were significantly more likely to have a SEN team. Schools with high percentages of pupils receiving LS/R support were more likely to have SEN teams.
- In general, post-primary schools were more likely to have SEN meetings, and to meet more frequently, than primary schools.
- A total of 86 per cent of schools reported having a *policy* on special educational needs although over a fifth of primary schools did not. Just half of the schools (fewer at post-primary level) reported having a *written plan* for the organisation of special educational needs in their schools.
- Some 80 per cent of schools indicated they had access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Disadvantaged schools in general were significantly more likely to have access to NEPS. In primary schools, access to speech and language specialists was poor at 44 per cent of the total.
- Over three-quarters of the schools (78 per cent) indicated they were engaged in devising individual education plans (IEPs), with a significantly higher percentage

- of primary respondents (97 per cent) compared to post-primary (59 per cent) reporting such activities.
- The percentage of students with *assessed disabilities* in the schools, as reported by LS/R teachers, varied between 6 per cent and 8 per cent, with higher proportions reported in post-primary schools. Over half (55 per cent) of the responding teachers identified themselves as learning support (LS) teachers and 38 per cent identified themselves as resource or special educational needs (SEN) teachers. Just 7 per cent identified themselves as having the dual designation. The majority (86 per cent) of respondents were female. Three-quarters (75 per cent) had more than 10 years' teaching experience. Four-fifths (81 per cent), however, had 10 years' experience or less with special educational needs, with close to half (44 per cent) having five years' or less SEN experience. Teachers in disadvantaged schools were slightly more likely to have longer periods of work with special educational needs. Most of the teachers (77 per cent) had volunteered to work with special educational needs, with a slightly higher proportion at post-primary level but a substantial proportion of teachers had *not* chosen to go into this field but had been allocated to the role by school management.
- Most teachers had undertaken some type of in-service in special education. Oneeighth *did not* have any professional development or in-service of any type in special education. Overall, 37 per cent of LS/R teachers did not have any qualification in special educational needs and this was statistically significantly greater at primary level.

Roles and responsibilities

- Teachers reported being overburdened in their role and described differences between their current and ideal roles as an LS/R teacher.
- Primary teachers attached significantly greater importance to activities focused on individual students (such as IEP development, review and implementation, monitoring student progress, etcetera) than did post-primary teachers, as part of the current LS/R teacher role. However, post-primary teachers perceived individual student-focused activities as having greater importance when it came to the ideal LS/R role. Post-primary teachers gave collaborative and administrative work higher importance.

- The range of roles undertaken was very broad at both levels and there is a need for role definition in both sectors.
- Analysis of the data indicated little awareness shown of the need for the type of proactive, inclusion-focused, collaborative LS/R role that is so emphasised in the international literature.

Professional development

- Types of learning difficulties, teaching strategies, language and literacy, and teaching mathematics were in the top five choices of course content for both sectors.
- Requested professional development focused mainly on the IEP process, knowledge of specific disabilities, administrative skills, testing diagnosis and assessment, teaching methodologies (including team-teaching) relevant to SEN and contact with experienced teachers.
- Collaboration did not feature highly in suggested course content despite desires to be more collaborative.
- Courses which explore and critique the theory and practice of inclusion and special education, such as sociology and philosophy, received low rankings, as did research.
- There was little evidence of a desire for leadership skill development but a high frequency of requests for general 'up-skilling' and unspecified courses and inservice.
- Teachers with and without qualifications in special educational needs had similar professional development requests, perhaps indicating that current professional development for special educational needs does not promote teacher resilience (see Chapter 3). There was evidence of a high emphasis on training teachers to respond to their current, specific situation. The findings showed very little demand for developing teachers' capabilities in researching, implementing and evaluating effective teaching and learning strategies for the diversity of students they will encounter over their teaching careers, in contrast to identified good practice from the international literature.
- The need to develop system capacity at school level in the area of special educational needs was mentioned by few research participants.

 Tension between the need for individual expertise in the area of special education and the need for distributed expertise among the whole-school staff was noted.

Recommendations

Recommendations arising from the study were made under five headings:

- School plan to include a written plan of all measures being taken to promote an inclusive school;
- 2 Establishment of special educational needs adviser role evidence pointed to a need for overall responsibility for the co-ordination of special education in school with a management and leadership function and for the incumbent to be a member of the school management team;
- 3 Collaborative working evidence pointed strongly to the need to develop the collaborative aspects of the LS/R role, to work with management, teachers, SNAs and other ancillary staff as well as with parents and other external agencies;
- 4 Course provision and components the evidence indicated a need for ongoing professional development for teachers in this role, consequently the role of the Department of Education and Science as a support service for specialist and general teachers should be further developed and a framework for in-career professional development for teachers developed which would allow for detailed needs identified by LS/R teachers and school principals to be met by universities, colleges and other providers;
 - 5 Research and review in order to ensure that an effective inclusive education at the highest international standard is provided, and that the changing needs of students, teachers and schools are met, professional development in relation to SEN/inclusion should be the subject of ongoing research and review.

Statement of relevance

The research findings help identify the professional development requirements of those mainstream primary and post-primary teachers who are confronted with an increasingly diverse range of students with special educational needs. The results also provide criteria to evaluate the appropriateness of current professional development programmes in special educational needs and offer recommendations for future professional development programmes. Course providers may use the research findings to target specific areas of teachers' professional development requirements.

1 Introduction: Background to the Research Project

1.1 Rationale for the Research

It is anticipated that this research will contribute to the knowledge base in the area of teacher education and will provide a reference for professional development programmes in inclusion and special education in Ireland. The impetus for this research stemmed from the recent expansion of teachers specifically engaged to teach the growing numbers of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools and the consequent demand for professional development in aspects of inclusion and special education.

The main aim was to identify the professional development requirements of mainstream primary and post-primary teachers who are dealing with a progressively diverse range of students. A corollary of this was to identify the teachers' changing roles and responsibilities as they responded to the challenges of emerging teaching and learning situations.

The demographics of mainstream schools' intake have changed significantly in recent years with increasing numbers of students being identified as having special educational needs. This has resulted in a very substantial increase in the number of teachers involved in teaching students with special educational needs. At primary level, there has been an increase in teachers working specifically with students with learning support and other special needs from 1,500 in 1998 to almost 5,000 in 2005 – one in every five teachers. At post-primary level, in 1998 there were only 200 resource teachers whereas, today, there are 1,600 whole-time equivalent resource teachers (Government of Ireland, 2005b). These recently assigned teachers must be able to access professional development that equates with their current and future needs.

Although many pre-service teacher education courses in Ireland now offer modules on special educational needs (Shevlin & Kearns, 2006), this is a recent innovation and practising teachers who qualified before the addition of such courses have had little professional development in teaching students with special educational needs. In the main, these pre-service modules are directed at the general teacher, teaching in inclusive

environments. For qualified teachers appointed to work as learning support, resource or special education teachers, there still exists a necessity for in-career professional development in the area. This need is met, *inter alia*, by courses at postgraduate level, recognised by the Department of Education and Science, which are offered by several third-level institutions. For this reason, the literature reviewed below concentrates mainly on the previous international research relating to continuing professional development rather than to the earlier phases of the teacher education continuum, that is initial teacher education and induction. This review is organised according to core themes underlying the research: the changing discourse on disability; changes in policy and legislation; teachers' attitudes to inclusion; international patterns in the roles and functions of teachers of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs; competences, outcomes and standards in teaching pupils with disabilities and special educational needs; international issues in education for teachers of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs in Ireland.

The rationale for the proposed research is underpinned by several factors: the increasing diversity of students with special educational needs attending mainstream schools and the legislative obligation to ensure that these students have an education appropriate to their needs; the 300 per cent increase in teachers engaged in teaching students with special educational needs in the past six years and the duty of ensuring that these teachers have the essential relevant training; the necessity to progress research in the areas of special education and teacher professional development in Ireland.

An additional factor is the recent change in the role of LS/R teachers' as outlined in circular SP.ED02/05 at primary level, and at post-primary level in the guidelines *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs* (Department of Education and Science, 2007). These changes underline the necessity to ensure that the professional-development programmes currently available reflect these changes. From the perspective of the third-level institutions providing the programmes, the move towards the modularisation of courses, in accordance with the Bologna Declaration (European Union, 1999), gives an opportunity to modify and reassess courses to ensure they reflect recent developments in teacher professional development and in inclusive education. Equally important is the need to ensure that the courses on offer meet the requirements

of this emerging profession and that the concerns and interests of the course participants and stakeholders in special needs education are reflected in the professional development they undertake.

The move towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools, now evident in the Irish educational system, is grounded in changes in the discourse, policy and legislation on disability-related issues at an international and national level. This discourse is outlined below.

1.2 The Changing Discourse on Disability

In recent decades, the concept of what it means to have a disability and 'special needs' has been revised. The change reflects the move from a medical model of disability to a social model of disability (Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000). The medical model of disability that had prevailed, viewed disability as a deficit within the individual, highlighting the person's inability to function within the established structures and systems of society. In the education sector, the result of this perception of disability was the establishment of segregated classes and special schools which focused on strategies of remediation – identifying an individual's 'problems' and developing specialised programmes to enable the person to adapt to society (McDonnell, 2003).

This perspective recognises that humankind consists of a diversity of individuals, all with unique characteristics and needs. Hence, 'disability' is construed as society's inflexibility in accommodating the differing needs of individuals. The inclusion movement in education, rooted in this social model and rights discourse on disability, promotes an inclusive approach to education wherein students with disabilities are educated alongside their peers within the local community (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan & Shaw, 2000). Within this framework, mainstream schools are required to adapt and accommodate a diverse group of students with a variety of needs. This social model of disability is further supported by the human rights movement, which demands equal rights and access to opportunities for all people irrespective of differences such as race, gender, disability and class. It has been argued by some experts that there is an insufficient impact of the social model of disability (Allan, 2003). A

further key issue identified is how teachers can be supported in maximising student achievement and in ensuring inclusivity (ibid; Ferguson, 2008).

1.2.1 Inclusion

This brings us to a further concept central to the changing discourse on disability – that of inclusion. Most developed countries have adopted a policy of greater inclusion of students with special educational needs within mainstream schooling (OECD, 2005: 29). The OECD has pointed out that these developments require a re-examination of the role of teachers, and consequently of their preparation, work and careers. Teachers are expected to develop knowledge on special education, on appropriate teaching and management processes, and in working with support personnel (ibid: 98). It has also been pointed out, of course, that it is essential to engage in critical policy analysis on this very important issue (O'Brien & Ó Fathaigh, 2007) and to accept that there can sometimes be contradictions between the rhetoric of inclusive education and the reality of the expansion of special provision for an increasing number of students which may be characterised by varying levels of inclusive practice (Zoniou-Sideri *et al*, 2006).

The concept of inclusion carries two strong connotations: first, that schools should both accept and celebrate diversity among all pupils; second, that schools should be caring communities. Inclusion is seen as a process that particularly focuses on those groups who have historically been marginalised or have under-achieved in schools. Inclusion is a term which means including children of all backgrounds, irrespective of gender, religion, class, ethnicity or any other characteristic, although it has come to have a particular resonance for persons with disabilities and/or special educational needs. Inclusion in regular classes has been found to improve the chances of students with special educational needs obtaining vocational or academic competence, especially for those functioning at relatively high levels (Myklebust, 2007). It has been suggested (Lingard & Mills, 2007) that 'socially just' pedagogies (that is, those which emphasise 'becoming' rather than 'being' and which open up resistant spaces and potential territories of social justice – Goodley, 2007) can make a difference in terms of schooling as a good in itself.

It is important to emphasise that inclusion in education is a very broad concept. In the UK, the groups that must be included in inclusive schools have been defined by Ofsted

(the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) as follows: girls and boys; men and women; black and minority ethnic and faith groups; Travellers; asylum seekers and refugees; learners with 'special educational needs'; 'gifted and talented' learners; children 'looked after' by the local authority; sick children; young carers; children from families under stress; pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers; learners at risk of disaffection and exclusion (Ofsted, no date: 4). Ofsted's definition of groups to be included and supported in the mainstream is wide and one which presents a challenge in the Irish as well as in the British system. In exploring the attitudes of teachers to inclusion, this project accepts this wider definition, but focuses on the attitudes and professional development needs of teachers for students with special educational needs and disabilities.

1.3 Changes in Policy and Legislation

The transformation in the perception of and response to disability was paralleled by changes in legislation and policy. These changes subsequently filtered through to affect educational provision in Ireland.

1.3.1 Changes in international policy and legislation

The evolving realisation of education as a human right for all is rooted in the concept that all humans are equal and have equal rights irrespective of individual differences. The fundamental expression of this concept is the non-binding Universal Declaration of Human Rights – UDHR (United Nations, 1948) which established the principle of equality among people as a fundamental human right. Human rights are enforceable through a number of international treaties, either as covenants or conventions¹. In those countries that have ratified them, six core treaties have given legislative status to human rights without discrimination of any kind. Ireland has ratified these UN treaties. This ensures a legal entitlement to human rights for all people and prohibits discrimination on any grounds such as disability. To strengthen the protections in the existing human rights treaties for the 600 million people worldwide with disabilities, the International

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¹ These treaties are: the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (United Nations, 1965), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – ICCPR (United Nations, 1966a), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – ICESCR (United Nations 1966b), the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 1979), the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (United Nations, 1984) and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989).

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted (United Nations, 2006). Ireland has signed this treaty and is in the process of ratifying it. Thus, in every sphere of human rights, people with disabilities are entitled to enjoy rights equivalent to those of their peers and this entitlement has been ratified by legislation. This entitlement to equal human rights applies to the area of education and in particular to the education of children with disabilities.

From a perusal of policy and legislative documents, it is evident that education has a twofold mission in the human rights agenda: first, education as an end in itself where equality must be upheld and, second, education as a means of promoting human rights. Both these aims are consistent with providing inclusive education for children with special educational needs. Worldwide, accessibility to education is varied and dependent on a number of factors which include gender, social class and disability. In developing countries, only 2 per cent of children with disabilities have access to education or rehabilitation and there is a proven link between disability, social exclusion and poverty (Quinn *et al*, 2002). Thus, there is a need to centre the demand for inclusive education for children with special educational needs in the legislative framework of human rights and to demonstrate the international legal imperative to provide such education in those countries that have signed and ratified these treaties.

The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA): the Jomtien Declaration (UNESCO, 1990) among other goals, promoted the target of access to free primary education for all by 2000 and included references to the education of children with disabilities. To strengthen commitment to the education of children with disabilities, a conference was convened in Salamanca in Spain and the ensuing statement and action plan reaffirmed the pledge of Education for All but specifically focused on the education of children with disabilities. The principle of inclusive education was established as a cornerstone in achieving this action plan.

The Salamanca Statement endorsed the goal of providing inclusive education for all children. Regular schools which included all children, irrespective of their differences, were perceived as the most effective means of promoting education for all, anti-discriminatory attitudes and building inclusive societies (Section 2, The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Educational Needs (UNESCO, 1994).

A significant policy direction emanating from Salamanca was that children with disabilities should attend the local school that would be attended if the child did not have a disability.

The recognition that educating all children together as a means of promoting tolerance, understanding and social cohesion is a concept also underpinned by the Delors report (UNESCO, 1996). In *Education: The Treasure Within*, Delors outlines the four pillars of education for the 21st century: to learn to learn, to learn to be, to learn to do and to learn to live together. The equal importance of each pillar is gaining acceptance. In particular, the significance of 'learning to live together' is impinging upon collective consciousness of increasingly diverse societies. It is through being educated together that all children will become aware of the diversity of humankind.

By 2000, although progress had been made towards providing educational opportunities for the world's children, the Jomtien target of education for all by 2000 was not reached. This lack of access to education means the denial of human rights for 113 million children who do not have access to education and to the 880 million illiterate adults. The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All set revised targets to achieve universal education by 2015. Here, the challenge of ensuring that the policies of government and funding agencies adhere to 'the broad vision of Education for All as an inclusive concept' is again reiterated (UNESCO, 2000). Further, in Section 19 of the commentary, children with disabilities are specifically mentioned as an at-risk group.

Taken together, the various declarations, treaties, reports and action plans emanating from the UN on the subject of disability and education all clearly advocate the inclusion of the child with special needs in the mainstream educational setting. The exhortations to governments to develop inclusive educational policies are derived from this basis. Ireland has signed these treaties and therefore is subject to the monitoring mechanisms that ensure compliance with the tenets of the treaties. Hence, the progression towards inclusive education must be a key target of Irish educational policy. This move towards inclusive education is further impelled by Ireland's membership of the European Union and the endorsement of inclusive education therein.

1.3.2 EU policy and legislation on education

As a member of the EU, Ireland is committed to providing education for all children and to promoting inclusion. Article 2 of the European Convention of Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950) enshrines the right to education for all and Article 14 precludes discrimination on any grounds. Ireland is a signatory to Resolution 90/C 162/02 concerning the integration of children and young people with disabilities into ordinary systems of education (European Community, Council of Ministers of Education, 1990) which mandates the pursuit of an inclusive policy in education. The council also recommends that, in pursuit of this inclusive policy, member-states facilitate teacher education in special needs at both pre-service and in-service stages of the teaching career.

In the Malaga Ministerial Declaration, *People with Disabilities: Progressing towards Full Participation as Citizens* (Europe, Council of Ministers, 2003), the Council of Europe acknowledged the importance of the education system as an instrument of social integration and reaffirmed the need for all children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools. The Key Principles for Special Needs Education (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003) also restated this objective and the commitment was further strengthened in the *Action Plan to Promote the Rights and Full Participation of People with Disabilities in Society: Improving the Quality of Life for People with Disabilities in Europe 2006-2015*. This plan again emphasised the goal of ensuring that national governments develop educational provision for students with disabilities and ensure such students receive the support they require to access an effective education (Europe, Council of Ministers, 2006). Thus, at EU level, policy commits the Irish government to providing inclusive education for children with disabilities.

1.3.3 Irish policy and legislation on education

Within its own legislation and policy, Ireland has taken on the commitment to ensuring children with disabilities have an appropriate education. Ireland has ratified international pieces of legislation that uphold human rights and the rights of people with disabilities to be treated equally in every sphere of life. These rights are further strengthened by national legislation. In addition to constitutional rights, which apply to all citizens, legislation was specifically drawn up to ensure that Ireland complied with

the EU's position on equality as a human right and the rights of people with disabilities is expressly acknowledged in other legislation. The legislation relevant to this research is: the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2004 (Government of Ireland, 1998-2004), the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 (Government of Ireland, 2000-2004), Education (Welfare) Act (Government of Ireland, 2000), the Equality Act (Government of Ireland, 2004a), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (Government of Ireland, 2004b) and the Disability Act (Government of Ireland, 2005a).

To summarise, at present in Ireland, there are laws that specifically legislate against inequality and others that explicitly outline the legal rights of people with disabilities. Thus, in Ireland, all people, with and without disabilities, have equal rights in law and these rights extend to the education system.

Much of this legislation has only been passed in the last decade and it has resulted in a fundamental change in the legal position of people with disabilities in Irish society and their right to education. In the past in Ireland, many students with disabilities had either been denied an education or been segregated from mainstream education (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007; McDonnell, 2003). At present, Ireland is in the throes of change from an expected norm of segregated educational provision for people with disabilities to a position where an inclusive educational setting is demanded as a right. This change has occurred gradually, and can be traced through a number of reports and policy developments. The most significant of these are the Special Education Review Committee report (DES, 1993), Charting Our Education Future: White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995), A Strategy for Equality: Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996). In the main, the legislation and policy in Ireland pertaining to the education of students with disabilities promotes and supports inclusive educational settings. However, limits are placed on the extent of supports that must be provided by reference to the availability of resources. Thus, the obligation to provision is capped by the finance deemed available.

The changes arising from legislation and policy for the education of persons with disabilities and special educational needs has thrown the spotlight firmly on teachers and their professional development needs. The cultural and professional changes

required in schools to meet the needs of more diverse pupils should not be underestimated. To contextualise the study, in the next sections we summarise the international findings on teachers' attitudes, roles, competences and standards in relation to the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Also reviewed are issues in the education and professional development of teachers of pupils with special educational needs.

1.4 Teachers' Attitudes to Inclusion

Attitudes are important. Positive attitudes on the part of teachers facilitate more successful inclusion. However, research among second-level mainstream teachers in Ireland has shown that, despite articulating positive dispositions towards students with disabilities and special educational needs and displaying generally positive attitudes towards the inclusion of such students in their schools, only a very small minority would accord inclusion as an inalienable right without some aspect of conditionality, usually related to within-person variables, such as the nature of one's disability or special need and its possible impact on other students (Kinsella, 2009). International studies suggest that attitudes towards integration are strongly influenced by the nature of the disabilities and/or educational problems being presented, that teachers are often not prepared to meet the needs of students with significant disabilities and that the severity of the disabling condition presented to them determines their attitudes towards integration (Avramidis *et al.*, 2000).

Research on teachers' attitudes to inclusion in countries such as Italy and Northern Ireland has shown that the attitudes that teachers develop can constitute an obstacle to the full realisation of scholastic integration (Zambelli & Bonni, 2004; Lambe & Bones, 2006). Analysis of research on teachers' attitudes to including children with disabilities in the UK has shown evidence of positive attitudes, but no evidence of acceptance of a total inclusion or 'zero reject' approach to special educational provision. Teachers' attitudes have been found to be strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disabling condition presented to them (child-related variables) and less by teacher-related variables (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

On whether it is the child or the system which should adjust, international research shows some variations. In Slovenia, for example, teachers have been found to assume that it is up to the Roma child (with or without a disability) to adjust to the school system rather than vice versa, while the child's parents are required to prepare the child for the system as well as they can, both assumptions being quite contrary to the idea of inclusively oriented schooling. Teachers did not see themselves as responsible either for the child's school results or his social inclusion. Length of experience is relevant (Lesar *et al*, 2006). Research in the United Arab Emirates has revealed a difference in attitude of teachers towards the type of disability in relation to years of experience. Teachers with one to five years' experience were more in favour of including students with both mental disabilities and hearing impairments (Alghazo & Naggar Gaad, 2004).

Teacher education (or the lack of inclusive education) has also been the focus of investigation. For example, research among Spanish teachers suggests that the treatment of cultural diversity by Spanish universities is, in general, insufficient for the training needs that students will demand from the educational system now and in the future. This research argued that an important first step would be to develop positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion, which can then guide new educational approaches (Moliner Garcia & Garcia Lopez, 2005). Research in Israel found variations between Israeli and Palestinian teachers in their propensity to include. This research recommended the preparation of an intervention programme, including knowledge about the philosophy of inclusion and about the various types of disability and special strategies in working with them, to equip teachers especially regarding the inclusion of pupils with emotional/behavioural problems and mental retardation (Lifshitz *et al*, 2004).

1.5 International Patterns in the Roles and Functions of Teachers of Pupils with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs

The international trends towards greater inclusion of students with special educational needs within mainstream schooling, outlined above, have led to changes in school organisation and to the development of new roles within mainstream schools. In

particular, schools at primary and secondary levels have identified roles variously described in the literature as 'resource teacher', 'learning support teacher', 'support teacher' or 'special educational needs co-ordinator'. While countries differ somewhat in the responsibilities and duties assigned to these various roles, what emerges strongly from the research to date is the incremental nature of the workload and complexity attaching to these roles.

In the UK, the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) role lies at the heart of the movement towards increased inclusion. There, the government has sought to define this role within a revised code of practice for special educational needs and in a set of national standards (Szwed, 2007a). Findings of a survey of primary schools indicate that the role cannot be generalised and that SENCos are operating in increasingly complex contexts within very different management structures. For SENCos to be successful in the sphere of whole-school influence, they need to be able to plan strategically for special educational needs. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is a matter for the school as a whole and it has been recommended that SENCos should be members of the school senior management team in order to play a strategic role (ibid). In this survey, the difficulties that SENCos reported most frequently in fulfilling their role were: lack of time; liaison with staff; liaison with external agencies; bureaucracy; and the changing SENCo role itself. From this and other research, it has been argued that bureaucracy, paperwork, and workload - particularly for SENCos in mainstream schools – must not increase further than current levels. Evidence shows that these are already excessive. All SENCos need sufficient resources of time, space and administrative backup (Bangs, 2005).

Despite the revision of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice in 2001, many SENCos are still overwhelmed by the operational nature of the role with little support, time or funding to consider more strategic aspects of inclusion and special educational needs (Cole, 2005). Research points to SENCos as a group of educational professionals committed to children with special educational needs, and who work to promote their learning and inclusion – sometimes within what has been described as 'hostile' environments (ibid). There is evidence of a lack of consistency, over time and across contexts, in interpretations of the SENCo role and of variation in workload, status and position within school hierarchies, and that SENCos often feel undervalued and

unappreciated because the difference they make is not visible or capable of being measured (Mackenzie, 2007).

Findings have confirmed that management support is highly important in effective special educational needs co-ordination. Where SENCos had sufficient non-contact time and status, they felt efficient (Cowne, 2005). Research has uncovered the wide variety and expanding roles held by SENCos: the majority requiring work with pupils, parents, teachers, teaching assistants and outside agencies. The diversity of the role is widening, requiring SENCos to take on new challenges (ibid). Research has also suggested that the role of the SENCo should be reconfigured as a senior manager one, or at least to have a strong link to the senior management team (Layton, 2005; Gerschel, 2005; Szwed, 2007b).

In Northern Ireland, recent research findings have shown that the responsibilities, skills and attributes expected of the SENCo are numerous and that it is a core position within schools, yet carries a substantial teaching load. The role is also strongly managerial and support is fragmented in practical terms (Abbott, 2007). This research argued that the SENCo workload, as defined by government, is one of the most challenging in any school – especially given the ongoing battle with time, bureaucracy and financial constraints, attitudinal barriers, *all* staff requiring further professional development and a disappointing level of collaboration with outside agencies (ibid).

The idea of the importance of whole-school participation in the inclusion of students with disabilities and special educational needs also emerges strongly from the research in several countries. Research in the UK has emphasised its importance as does inquiry in other European countries such as Spain. Evidence from Spain suggests that if the attention to special needs students is understood as a responsibility shared among the whole educational community, the 'support teacher' can provide one more link in the chain that supports this aim rather than needing to be the chief, or only, responsible member. This research proposes that future perspectives on the role of support teachers should be directed towards the development of a position centred not upon the disability of students, but upon a curricular model where responsibility for the education of these students is shared throughout the school. The creation of support teams for addressing the needs of individual students, appropriate teacher training and the use of

methodological innovations are fundamental tools in this process of change (Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001).

The major theme identified from international research – that of a very high workload for this role – is evident in a number of countries. In Australia, for example, it has been suggested that while the profiling of a standard role for support teachers for learning difficulties should be seen as a positive move, devising a list of responsibilities that are excessively broad and unmanageable is unlikely to assist in better defining their role. While Australian support teachers will embrace some direction in their roles, the diversity of the population that they serve and the differing school cultures that they work in, together with the constantly changing needs of their clientele, requires their role to remain flexible, so that they can best meet the needs of their own unique populations (Forlin, 2001).

School and national cultures have emerged as of significance. There is varying emphasis on the use of segregated settings. This varies from country to country and within regions. Even in Scandinavia (often thought to be on the high end of the inclusion continuum) variations are to be found between different countries. Special teacher education in Finland, for example, is fairly unified, giving an impression that the teacher's professional identity in this country is reasonably clear (Hausstatter & Takala, 2008). There is also a clear relationship between official requirements and the special teacher education curriculum. Such unity can be helpful: the schools, teachers, parents and pupils know what kinds of knowledge and help to expect from special needs teachers. On the other hand, Norwegian special teacher education and national requirements are closely aligned with each other (ibid). The main goal is the creation of inclusive academic schools. The means of reaching this goal are interpreted very differently from institution to institution, however. The result is that there is no basic core of professional knowledge among Norwegian special teachers. Norway affirms the principle of all-inclusive schooling and effort is put into reintegrating dropouts. The concept of inclusion enjoys a high position in Norwegian schools and this is also reflected in special teacher education. Finnish special teacher education has not universally focused on inclusion. For instance, dropouts have successfully been assigned to segregated settings; and inclusion is considered a part of school policy in some cities, such as Helsinki, but not nationwide (ibid).

The evidence on the role of teachers with responsibilities for students with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream schools from several countries emphasises a number of factors. First, the workload is complex and heavy and tends to burgeon incrementally. Second, the importance of whole-school involvement is emphasised. Third, the need to assert the leadership role of the special educational needs co-ordinator has been heavily emphasised, as has the importance of aligning it to management and the senior management teams in schools. The importance of flexibility in the definition of the role has been emphasised, not least to take account of variations in school and national cultures.

1.6 Competences, Outcomes and Standards in Teaching Pupils with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs

The issues of competences, outcomes and standards in education are controversial and vigorously debated. The dominant tendency in state education policy throughout most of Europe, North America and most of the developed world from the last quarter of the 20th century onwards has been the development of discourses of competences, outcomes and standards. There is far from universal agreement on any of these concepts, however.

1.6.1 Competences

There have been numerous debates concerning models of 'competence'-based – or 'competency'-based – learning and the epistemological problems attaching to some of them, particularly the more behaviourist/reductionist examples (Tarrant, 2000; Eynon & Wall, 2002; Burke, 2007). The most dramatic of these is the often quoted *Florida Catalogue of Teacher Competencies* which listed 1,301 competencies for teacher education (Hilbert, 1981; Brundrett, 2000). Most criticisms have been levelled at competence models which are instrumentalist and employer-led, or are narrowly focused on work-based competences (Hargraves, 2000; Canning, 2000). In particular, reservations have been expressed about lists of competences characterised by 'tick-box' practices and fragmentation (Kelly & Horder, 2001).

Recent debates have seen the development of approaches to competence definitions which are more reflective and holistic. These definitions are linked to outcomes-based learning and take a holistic, integrative and reflexive approach – one recommended by

critical analysts for professional formation for situations where complex and sensitive judgements must be made (ibid; also Oser *et al*, 2006). Another obvious recommendation made for the development of competence-based curricula and assessments is to reduce complexity and to collapse competences into one or two well-articulated sets (Schmid & Kiger, 2003). The European Tuning Educational Structures project (focused on the implementation of the Bologna Declaration and the comparability of degrees within the European Higher Education Area) has used the term 'competences' to mean a useful grouping of capabilities and capacities that students acquire or develop during a programme:

Competences represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values. Fostering these competences is the object of all educational programmes.

Gonzales & Wagenaar, 2007: 139

The notion of competences, then, is useful when very loosely described. Since then, the staff on a programme can use them as 'reference points' in curriculum design (ibid).

Coolahan (2007) has argued in his review of EU and OECD policy on teacher education that, depending on the mode devised, the competence-based approach can be 'professionally positive and benign' or it can be of a narrow, 'checklist' character and be 'professionally malign'. The notion of a competence-based approach to teacher education is not new and, for example, has been in use in Northern Ireland for some considerable time. The NI General Teaching Council, after much debate among professionals, has reduced an original list of some 92 competences to 27 (Loughrey, 2007). In endorsing this approach, the council has argued that the teacher competences must be considered holistically and not treated as a series of discrete entities, divested of values or a sense of mission and professional identity (GTCNI, no date).

The competences are not to be viewed as discrete skills, which once demonstrated are mastered for all time; rather the acquisition of any competence should be seen on a continuum reflecting the dynamic interplay between the nature of professional knowledge and the opportunities afforded to teachers by the context of their school and professional lives.

ibid: 5

'Teaching competence' is a complex and integrated whole of qualities which a person cannot develop in a rush (Brouwer, 2007). One principle underpinning the NI Council's concept of competence is the centrality of reflective practice. In this context, reflective practice needs to be internalised as part of a teacher's professional identity (GTCNI, no date). For a fuller discussion of competences see Drudy *et al*, 2009.

The issue of competences in the literature has two dimensions. One focuses on developing student competences; the other on teacher competences. In relation to developing student competences, specifically those of students with SEN, a recent longitudinal study in Norway has argued that it is more beneficial for most students with SEN to receive their specially adapted teaching in ordinary classes where they are met with expectations to achieve – from teachers *and* peers. Evidence suggests that in such classes the possibility of achieving formal competence is much greater than in special classes. Further, competence attainment is crucial because it enables adolescents with SEN to find jobs that make them economically independent (Myklebust, 2006). The Norwegian study provides arguments to those advocating inclusive policies because the analyses document that regular classes are beneficial for competence achievement thus contributing to resilience among students with special educational needs (Myklebust, 2007).

From the perspective of teacher competence, a need has been identified in many countries for extended and new teacher competence to meet the challenges of inclusive education. Again from Norway, evidence has emerged about the development of teacher competence in secondary schools. A programme developed and implemented during the 1990s aimed to start a continuing process in schools directed at promoting inclusive education and improving the quality of education for pupils with special educational needs. Evidence emerged of a paramount need for class and subject teachers to adapt teaching and curricula to the needs and resources of pupils with learning difficulties, and for school development in order to promote inclusive education. The study has argued that to realise inclusive education, *development of change competence* is also important – that is theoretical and practical knowledge of how professional and systemic change and pedagogical improvements in schools can be implemented. The study concluded that both a philosophy of inclusion and disability-specific information is necessary, but not enough. Teachers and school administrators should also be competent

(and willing) to serve as change agents, and to participate in development work as a regular part of their work (Tangen, 2005).

1.6.2 Outcomes

The notion of outcomes is closely linked to that of standards and competences. In teacher education in England, for example, the 'outcome standards' set out what a person must know, understand and be able to do to be awarded qualified teacher status (OECD, 2005: 115). Outcomes may be defined in different ways and thus measured in different ways. For example, in higher education (including teacher education) outcomes are increasingly assessed as 'intended learning outcomes' and are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning (Gonzales & Wagenaar, 2007: 146/7). The OECD, and other policy-making bodies, have in recent years suggested that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important factors in student outcomes (OECD, 2005: 12). This approach has been the subject of intense debate. This debate has been particularly prominent in the US, as well as in Europe. Cochran-Smith (2001) has argued that we should conceptualise and define the outcomes of teacher education for teacher learning, professional practice and student learning, as well as that how, by whom and for what purposes these outcomes should be documented, demonstrated and/or measured is of crucial importance to the future of teacher education. The outcomes, consequences and results of teacher education have become critical topics in nearly all of the state and national policy debates about teacher preparation and licensure, as well as in the development of many privately and publicly funded research agendas on teacher and student learning (ibid).

Likewise in the US, Darling-Hammond (2006b) has contended that productive strategies for evaluating outcomes are becoming increasingly important for the improvement, and even the survival, of teacher education. Based on the assessment of curriculum change in teacher education programmes, Darling-Hammond has pointed out that the introduction of much more explicit work on how to use technology in the classroom, how to work with parents and how to address special needs of exceptional students appeared to result in large increases in the proportions of graduates feeling adequately prepared in these domains – exceeding 80 per cent in each category by 2000 (ibid).

For Cochran-Smith (2001), many of the most contentious debates about outcomes in teacher education stem from two fundamentally different approaches to teacher education reform and from two fundamentally different views of the purposes of schooling. The first, intended to reform teacher education through professionalisation so all students are guaranteed fully licensed and well-qualified teachers, is based on the belief that public education is vital to a democratic society. The second, intended to reform teacher education through deregulation so that larger numbers of college graduates (with no teacher preparation) can enter the profession, is based on a market approach to the problem of teacher shortages that feeds off erosion of public confidence in education. The language of outcomes has become so much a part of the contemporary teacher education lexicon as to be completely normalised, she argues. She adds that there are important philosophical and methodological variations in the new focus on outcomes, especially whether pupils' achievement as measured by test scores is the only outcome examined, or whether other outcomes – such as teacher candidates' knowledge growth – count as well. The reductionist version of outcomes – that is, relying entirely or almost entirely on pupils' test scores in evaluating teacher preparation – is, she argues, highly problematic (Cochran-Smith, 2005).

1.6.3 Standards

In its review of teaching and teacher education in 25 countries, the OECD suggested that raising teacher quality and standards is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in school performance (OECD, 2005: 23). In similar vein, the Commission of the EU has recently highlighted the quality of teaching and teacher education as a key factor in securing the quality of education and improving the educational attainment of young people (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). These organisations suggest there is widespread recognition that countries need to have clear and concise statements of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do, and these teacher profiles need to be embedded throughout the school and teacher education systems. The profile of teacher competencies needs to derive from the objectives for student learning, and provide profession-wide standards and a shared understanding of what counts as accomplished teaching (OECD, 2005: 13).

With regard to standard setting, the concern among many educationalists, as Burke (2007) indicates, is that in the effort to meet the reasonable requirements and national obligations of states to set standards, there has developed an almost unstoppable trend to think in largely quantitative terms about teaching and teacher education. In other words, that performative cultures and policies in education have developed in a number of countries. The term 'performativity' is particularly associated with the work of the English sociologist Stephen Ball, and requires individual practitioners to 'organise themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations; to set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation' (Ball, 2003: 215). In the UK, since 1989, education has been dominated by the performativity discourse accompanied by the obsession with evidence: of children's learning; of teachers' performance; and of student teachers' 'covering' the standards (Turner-Bisset, 2007). The performative trends, which have developed in a number of countries but most notably in the UK, have resulted in concerns about their impact on the education of children with special educational needs and on the development of inclusive school systems. Lloyd (2008) has argued that there is no recognition of the inherent injustice of an education system where the curriculum continues to be exclusive and to emphasise narrow academic content, and where the measurement of success and achievement is concerned with attaining a set of norm-related standards. Just as in previous policy, she contends, the latest government strategy is founded on a deficit view of children with SEN and resorts to notions that compensation and normalisation are the means to ensuring access to equal educational opportunity.

Questions have been raised in some countries about the conflicting pressures created by performative policies on the one hand and, on the other, the drive to include increasing numbers of students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. There are those who argue that there are significant weaknesses in policy orientation and coordination which continue to undermine holistic and inclusive approaches. For example, issues and initiatives on social exclusion are still not linked to those concerning special educational needs, even though many pupils likely to be involved are a significant element of the special educational needs population in schools and despite the interrelationship between learning and other difficulties and social disadvantage and marginalisation (Bines, 2000). Some special education experts have argued that while, in principle, higher standards of attainment are entirely compatible with inclusive school

and educational system development, the standards agenda has concentrated on a narrow view of attainment as evidenced by national literacy, numeracy and science tests (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). They go on to argue that since schools are held to account for the attainments of their students and are required to make themselves attractive to families who are most able to exercise choice of school for their children, low-attaining students, students who demand high levels of attention and resource and students who are seen not to conform to school and classroom behavioural norms become unattractive to many schools (ibid). While Florian and Rouse (2001) also point to the conflicting demands of school improvement policies, as measured by high academic standards and the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, they conclude with a conceptualisation of inclusive schools as those that meet the dual criteria of enrolling a diverse student population and improving academic standards for all. When students, they argue, have access to a wide variety of support and teaching strategies, inclusive schools can also be effective schools as defined by current criteria (see also Sewell, 2004; Black-Hawkins *et al*, 2007).

Teachers, of course, are central to educational change and reform. Research has indicated that if governments are serious about raising standards of achievement, and thus standards of teaching, then it is important to understand how the conditions for teaching, central to motivation, job satisfaction and effectiveness, affect teachers. A survey of teachers in the UK confirmed that they are primarily motivated by a desire to help children and to contribute to society and that they generally believe they are effective in raising educational standards (Day *et al*, 2006). Because teachers' efforts are central to the success of standards-based reform, it has been suggested that the policy community look carefully at the beliefs about instruction that are rooted in its own reform theory (Loeb *et al*, 2008). A particular concern is that special learning needs are not well served. The research has suggested that if reforms give direct attention more single-mindedly to the needs of those students who have historically been least well served and least likely to succeed, then the promise of reform might be more fully realised (ibid).

There is, however, a widespread view emanating from the educational community itself (rather than policy-makers) of the possibilities for the professions of teaching and teacher education through the establishment of standards. For example, in the US

Darling-Hammond (2000b) has argued that professional standards are a lever for raising the quality of practice and that they are central to the cause of equity, protecting especially the least advantaged clientele from unscrupulous or incompetent practitioners. Standard setting is at the heart, she contends, of every profession. This view has clearly been adopted by a number of countries:

Several countries have developed Teaching Councils that provide teachers and other stakeholder groups with both a forum for policy development and, critically, a mechanism for profession-led standard setting and quality assurance in teacher education, teacher induction, teacher performance and career development. Such organisations seek to obtain for teaching the combination of professional autonomy and public accountability that has long characterised other professions such as medicine, engineering and law. This would involve teachers having greater say in the criteria for entry to their profession, the standards for career advancement, and the basis on which ineffective teachers should leave the profession.

OECD, 2005: 15

It has been suggested that one avenue to developing professionally-based standards is to generate intra-professional support within the teacher education communities internationally. As an example of one such set of standards, the Victorian Institute of Teachers in Australia has identified three main groupings for teaching standards: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement (Ingvarson et al, 2007). The Northern Ireland General Teaching Council has published its code of values and professional practice (GTCNI, no date). The most recently established Teaching Council on the island of Ireland has also developed and published the *Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers*. These include standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence (Teaching Council, 2007). In articulating the core values of teaching, the council says the following:

Teachers in their professional role show commitment to democracy, social justice, equality and inclusion. They encourage active citizenship and support students in thinking critically about significant social issues, in valuing and accommodating diversity and in responding appropriately.

ibid: 11

Care is also seen as a core value and as well as the legal duty of care which teachers exercise, their role as carer is signalled as central to their professional value system (ibid: 12) and the duty not to discriminate on the grounds of disability (or any other grounds) is incorporated in the code of professional conduct. Therefore, the notion of inclusion, and the values and practices underlying it, now form an integral part of the professional work of teachers, as defined by their regulatory body in Ireland. It follows that teacher education for inclusion must be an integral part of the continuum of teacher education from the initial phase, through induction and on to continuing professional development.

Thus, in an inclusive system, the standards that apply must be inclusive and appropriate to the needs of all students, to those who have disabilities and special educational needs and to those from all backgrounds. There should be continuous research, review and amendment of the standards, if required, to ensure their appropriateness for an inclusive system.

In sum, the evidence to date suggests that, in the identification of competences, educators and policy-makers should avoid the reductionist 'checklist' Competences should be flexible, holistic and incorporate interpersonal, intellectual, reflective and ethical values, as well as cognitive ones. From an educational perspective, the review suggests that outcomes are best defined in terms of intended learning outcomes of educational programmes. The experience of several countries indicates that highly politicised or philosophically and empirically problematic definitions of outcomes are inappropriate. Clearly there is a balance to be struck between setting standards to ensure quality in teaching and teacher education, and to ensure equity and the public good, on the one hand and, on the other, to avoid an excessive emphasis on performativity. Research has shown that the latter has led to negative consequences for teaching and for more marginalised students in a number of countries. The dangers of managerialist standard-setting by governments and of increased managerial and performative pressures have become a focus for research (Ranson, 2003). These dangers have been found to include the strengthening of corporate differentiation and increasing private ownership of educational services and infrastructures, combined with a certain amount of 'game-playing' or 'cynical compliance' on the part of teachers (Taylor Webb, 2006; Ball, 2003). In more performative systems, teaching becomes less

authentic (Taylor Webb, 2006), teachers 'play the game' and even (as observed in research in the US) engage in professional 'fabrications' of performative activities (ibid). Aside from over-shadowing the caring side of the professional work of teaching (Forrester, 2005), performative pressures have been found to represent a considerable loss of pedagogical autonomy for teachers (Thrupp, 2006). These issues are of particular relevance to the inclusion of students with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream schools. The evidence shows that the education and support of such children demand highly educated, skilled and professionally autonomous and committed teachers who can adapt teaching and curricula to the needs and resources of pupils with learning and other difficulties, and for school leaders who are change agents in the development of their schools. Teacher education and continuing professional development are, thus, at the core of the development of more inclusive educational systems.

1.7 International Issues in Education for Teachers of Pupils with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs

To date, the main concerns of the inclusive movement in education have been lobbying for changes in policy to: legislate for inclusion; promote organisational changes at regional and school level to enable inclusion; and to develop research on appropriate curricular content and strategies to accommodate students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Research has found that when they have access to a wide variety of support and teaching strategies, inclusive schools can also be effective schools as defined by current criteria (Florian & Rouse, 2001). Analysis of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results indicates that more inclusive schooling systems have both higher levels of performance and fewer disparities among students from differing socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2004: 197). In some countries (for example the UK), more specific information about the academic achievement of pupils described as having 'special educational needs' is now available, although conceptual and technical issues still require further development (Florian et al, 2004).

Many variables contribute to positive educational outcomes for students. The most influential are non-school variables, such as family and community background, ability and attitude (OECD, 2005). However, of the in-school factors which affect student learning, teachers are the single most significant source of variation and students benefit from a well-educated teaching force (ibid). The importance of a highly skilled teaching profession is also noted by the EU in the document *Education and Training 2010*. The recommendations emanating from this document will increasingly affect teachers' professional lives such as the ten common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications (EU Commission, 2005). Nationally, the commitment to establishing principles for teachers has been initiated by the Teaching Council of Ireland which has adopted a code of practice including standards of teaching, knowledge skill and competence (Teaching Council, 2007).

If we accept that the expertise and proficiency of teachers who teach children with special needs is crucial to a child's experience of the education system, then the development of excellent teacher education programmes in special needs must be the next challenge for supporters of inclusion and policy-makers. Teachers' skills and abilities are developed through apposite teacher preparation programmes. It is the quality and strength of these programmes that ultimately influence children's educational experience. The importance of high-quality teacher education programmes to ensure optimum quality learning experiences for students with special needs cannot be overstated. The content, methodologies and assessment of such programmes must be rigorously evaluated and continually improved.

A logical progression of this argument is that research on the preparation of teachers with responsibilities for special educational needs is of paramount importance in ensuring that students have access to the best possible education for their needs. Unfortunately, such research has been sporadic, specifically in relation to special educational needs, although there is a considerable amount of material on teacher education in general and recent peer-reviewed research in this area is summarised below. If we are to enhance the quality of learning for students' with special needs, we must continuously upgrade the quality of teacher professional development through systematic research.

Internationally, a very high preponderance of research recommendations as well as policy and expert reports on the education of persons with disabilities and special educational needs has emphasised the importance of teacher education in effecting change and moving to more inclusive systems. Teacher education, it is argued, must help teachers develop a coherent professional identity in addition to helping them be competent in subject matter pedagogy (Taylor Webb, 2006). Teacher identity, of course, is of particular importance in the education of persons with special educational needs in mainstream schools as traditionally this has been seen as the task of specialists and special schools and not the role of the mainstream teacher. In Northern Ireland, for example, where increased inclusion is the policy direction, a study of student teachers' attitudes to inclusion revealed evidence of support for the philosophy of inclusion and for inclusive practices generally, but also showed that many young teachers still show a strong attachment to, and belief in, traditional academic selection as a preferred education model (Lambe & Bones, 2006).

International research findings have indicated that teachers feel unprepared for inclusion. Research among Northern Ireland practitioners (Winter, 2006) found their recommended model of special needs education delivery would be a combination of 'permeation' plus 'standalone' courses with the focus on student characteristics, behaviour management, assessment and evaluation, and disability/SEN legislation. Practitioners in this study did not, however, feel their initial teacher education had prepared them adequately to teach in these inclusive settings regardless of whether it was a one- or a four-year programme. Consequently, a large number of teachers may lack the confidence needed to meet the pupils' special needs. Further research in Northern Ireland (Abbott, 2007) has suggested that a coherent plan at pre-service level would allay teachers' fears about different learning difficulties and disabilities, while experience with special educational needs on teaching practice would minimise the 'culture shock' beginning-teachers encounter. The principles and culture of inclusion are then, the study argues, more likely to permeate their early classroom experience. Other parts of the UK are also trying to move to a more inclusive system. Therefore, a need to equip teachers to work in more diverse classrooms from the start of their teaching careers has been identified (Golder et al, 2005).

While inclusive schools have been part of the American education system for some considerable time, teacher education for working in inclusive settings is still an important issue. Recent research (Anderson & Gumus, 2006) has explored how a course in special education has affected secondary general education pre-service teachers' attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, teaching students with mild disabilities and the degree of their preparedness (self-reported) in working with students with disabilities. The findings supported the hypothesis that a course in special education with necessary components (that is introductory special education knowledge, activities designed to enhance students' dispositions toward students with disabilities, and instructional strategies that will help general education teachers teach students with mild disabilities at the middle and secondary levels more effectively) can be effective in preparing secondary education pre-service teachers to work in inclusive classrooms (ibid). While the experience in Northern Ireland is quite recent, it is still possible to examine the extent to which initial teacher education (ITE) programmes have contributed to the development of inclusive attitudes, values and practices. Inclusive education is, arguably, the entitlement of all children and young people to quality education, irrespective of their differences or dispositions. It is about embracing educational values of equity, diversity and social justice (Moran, 2007). Analysis of the impact of teacher experience in teaching pupils with special educational needs in Greece has shown the positive impact of such experience and also demonstrated the importance of substantive long-term training in the formation of positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). Thus, it has been suggested, teacher educators need to embrace the paradigm shift that inclusive education demands and to engage in dialogue across a multiplicity of cultures, religions, identities and ways of thinking. This entails making teaching a moral, visionary profession in which social and moral questions are truly explicit and embedded and which embrace the greater, social and moral questions, rather than just teaching techniques and curriculum standards (Moran, 2007). This approach aligns very closely with reflective practice which, as the Northern Ireland General Teaching Council for example has pointed out (GTCNI, no date), needs to be internalised as part of a teacher's professional identity (see also Wearmouth, 2004).

Embedded in the recent debates about teacher education for inclusive schools and, indeed, in some issues just raised above, is what has been called 'the dilemma of

difference'. This consists in the seemingly unavoidable choice between identifying children's differences in order to provide for them differentially (with the risk of labelling and dividing) or accentuating 'sameness' and offering common provision (with the risk of not making available what is relevant to, and needed by, individual children) (Terzi, 2005). While key stakeholders such as the Office for Standards in Education in the UK (the inspectorate) have asserted the following:

Good teaching ensures that all pupils are enabled to learn effectively. You are not looking for different skills when exploring issues related to inclusion.

Ofsted, no date: 17

there are the dilemmas faced by stakeholders grappling with the very particular needs of students, such as students with autistic spectrum disorders. The varying needs of this group were explored by the Task Force on Autism which, while having a presumption that educational provision should be within the 'least restrictive environment', recommended the following in relation to teacher education:

... that training in Special Needs Education be an integral part of the basic training of all teachers; that modules on AS/HFA² and on coping with bullying be included in pre- and in-service teacher training for primary and second level teachers.

Task Force on Autism, 2001: 266

One solution to this dilemma is that initial teacher education courses and professional development courses should make room for critical discussion of the concept of inclusion, together with a consideration of pedagogic issues at school (Pearson, 2007). Such courses explicitly challenge the processes of pathologising 'difference' (and, ultimately, excluding individuals) currently operating in schools, while instigating reconstructed educational thinking and practice (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). Such courses also need to enable student teachers and in-career teachers to critique the medical model that many professionals bring into the schools which focuses on the

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² Asperger Syndrome/High Functioning Autism.

individual child rather than the education provided (Zoniou-Sideri *et al*, 2006) and to explore the alternative constructs and possibilities of the social model of disability (Barton, 2001).

As we have argued earlier, a high degree of variation internationally exists in relation to attitudes and to inclusion. We have already given examples of variations in approach in Scandinavia, for example, in Norway and Finland. These give rise to differences in approaches to teacher education. Inclusion is shown to be central to the fundamental discourse of special needs education in Norway but not so central in Finnish special teacher education. This comparative study contends that special teacher educators have the ability and right to shape the content and direction of the curriculum; and this has had a positive effect on the teaching methods and teaching policy of schools in their countries. Major change, however, seems to take longer than 20 years to effect (Hausstatter & Takala, 2008). Finland, of course, has built an international reputation for its teacher education system through its adoption of a research-based approach to teacher education. Recent research shows that Finnish student teachers appreciate the research-based approach as the main organising theme of teacher education but have found it to be more challenging than they expected (Jyrhama et al, 2008). It is important to note, however, that research has also shown that successful completion of a teacher education programme is only the first step to becoming an effective teacher for all pupils. Induction, continuing professional development and in-service programmes also play a significant role, and can be informed by these findings (Winter, 2006).

Induction is now internationally accepted as part of the continuum of lifelong learning and professional development for the teaching profession. Although it is just in its developmental phase in Ireland through the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction, induction has an important part to play in teacher education for inclusion and special educational needs. Research with newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in Ireland shows that working with students with special educational needs provides one of their greatest challenges in their first year of teaching and is a priority for professional development during their induction year (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006). Research from the UK mirrors this and shows that for special educational needs, the induction phase is extremely important as a vehicle for raising NQT confidence and competence in the area. The results show that confidence in identifying and teaching pupils with special educational

needs increases significantly during the induction period. Of particular interest is that confidence increases across all categories of special educational needs (Barber & Turner, 2007).

Given the rapidity of social, economic and educational change, it has become increasingly clear from policy and research debates that continuing professional development and lifelong learning are an essential part of the teaching career. Indeed, embedded professional development, delivered over an extended period of time, is critical in helping large systems change in substantive ways (Roach & Salisbury, 2006). While there is little argument about the necessity for continuing professional development, there is considerable debate about its philosophical basis and around its form and content. Sachs (2001) identifies two discourses on professionalism: democratic and managerial. Managerialist professionalism is being reinforced by employing authorities through their policies on teacher professional development with an emphasis on accountability, performativity and effectiveness. Democratic professionalism emerges from the profession itself. According to Sachs (2001), the core of democratic professionalism is an emphasis on collaborative, co-operative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders. Managerial professionalism has been the more dominant. A quotation from David Miliband, former British Minister for School Standards, gives a flavour of the 'managerial' approach:

Training and continuing professional development follow on naturally from performance management.

Miliband, 2003: 3

Earlier, we indicated concerns expressed in the UK about the impact on schools and teaching of the managerialist and performative policies pursued since the end of the 1980s. This is, indeed, not confined to the UK and emerges from studies in several countries (Drudy, 2008). Comparative research in Portugal and England has also illustrated unease. Portuguese and English teachers were critical of the national policies, and, within this, highly critical of how recent policies have been implemented in schools (Day *et al*, 2007).

The approach from the perspective of democratic professionalism may be represented by the Australian scholar, Nicole Mockler:

Professional learning can support the development of a transformative teaching profession. ... The development of a transformative teaching profession requires a reinstatement of trust, at both a local and a global level, allowing teachers to act with autonomy, to openly acknowledge their learning needs and to work collaboratively with other teachers to constantly develop their understanding and expertise. ... Transformative teacher professionalism seeks to develop teachers who are creative developers of curriculum and innovative pedagogues.

Mockler, 2005: 733, 742

Sachs poses some fundamental questions about who does have a legitimate right to be involved in defining teaching professionalism. She raises the question of whether state control and market forces or professional self-governance are really the only models of accountability available to us. Or can we, she asks, develop new approaches to teacher professionalism, based upon more participatory relationships with diverse communities (Sachs, 2001)? These are important questions for teacher education for inclusion – especially given the environments of uncertainty, plurality of values and competing viewpoints in the micro and macro political contexts (Wearmouth, 2004) and the importance and centrality of the relationship between home and school as an integral feature of how pupils learn and of the development and delivery of effective inclusion (O'Connor, 2007).

Irrespective of the philosophical or policy derivation of continuing professional development, there is no doubt of its importance in the development of inclusive systems or in the articulation of the educational rights of children. Behavioural issues may emerge in inclusive classrooms. Research from Israel, for example, examines how teachers actually cope with behavioural problems of included students. This research illustrated a gap between teachers' hypothetical knowledge and their applications of this knowledge in authentic classroom situations and cast some light on the actual behaviour of teachers in inclusive classrooms (Almog & Schechtman, 2007). Findings such as these demonstrate the need for continuing professional development for teachers.

As for the content of such continuing teacher education, research from Northern Ireland suggests that it should support inclusion for all serving teachers, with a focus on diversity and behaviour management, and with commonality and consistency across the different regions. This research suggests that special educational needs co-ordinators should have a part in all ongoing professional development, including liaison with, and support from, the psychology service and other professionals. Critical reflective practice, it is argued, should be an integral part of initial and continuing education, and must encourage everyone to consider how far their own actions create barriers to inclusion (Abbott, 2007).

Practical/clinical experience for students in initial teacher education has been integral to teacher education programmes in most countries (Drudy et al, 2009), although its length varies. Initial teacher education programmes which are primarily school-based have developed in some countries, although findings on their effectiveness are not fully supportive. In Australia, for example, research findings have not provided support for those who think that making teacher education 'practical' and 'school-based' is the answer to teacher pre-service education. Likewise, in the Netherlands, research has found that 'school-based teacher education' does not by itself guarantee valuable outcomes of training, as the Dutch government tends to believe (Brouwer, 2007). A study in Australia found that teachers who reported they were well prepared to meet the demands of their first year of teaching were more likely to have completed courses that gave them deep knowledge of the content they were expected to teach, and how students learned that content, as well as skill in: diagnosing students' existing levels of understanding of the content; planning activities that would promote further development of understanding; and assessing the extent to which development had taken place. However, the results of this study do say that teacher education matters. In a field where some have questioned the impact of, or need for, professional preparation programmes, the authors argue, this is a significant finding (Ingvarson et al, 2007). An evaluation of a Northern Ireland pilot programme that integrated problem-based and blended e-learning pedagogy to support student teachers learning in special needs and inclusion education found that using a carefully constructed blended programme can effectively support key teaching and learning aspects of pre-service training and help develop skills in critical reflection (Lambe, 2007). An exploration of the use of collaborative networks in teacher education in Cyprus has been found to encourage and assist student teachers to develop more effective practices. This study found that, in practical training, student teachers benefited from exposure to inquiry, critical commentary, dialogue and reflection. In this study, these were more easily achieved through the mechanism of building networked communities of practice (Angelides *et al*, 2007).

The importance of higher education institutions in initial and continuing teacher education is clearly set out in the communication of the Commission of the European Communities to the European Parliament in August 2007. The notion that universities have a key role to play not only in the pre-service and in-career education of teachers but in enhancing professionalism is not confined to Europe. In Australia, it has been argued that successful teacher education for the 21st century demands full professionalisation through university-based programmes that incorporate the contextual advantages of school-based teacher education without the reproductive disadvantages of apprenticeship models (Lovat & McLeod 2006). Highly politicised debates on professionalism in teaching in the US have also focused on teacher education - particularly on concerns about policy pressures to 'deregulate' the profession (that is to encourage untrained individuals to work as teachers in schools) and have led to an emphasis by many teacher educators on the importance of university education in the maintenance of professionalism (Cochran-Smith 2006; Darling-Hammond 2000a, 2000b, 2006a, 2006b; Schalock et al, 2006; Zeichner 2006). Linda Darling-Hammond, former executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, has suggested that if all teachers are to have access to knowledge and all students are to have access to well-prepared teachers, universities and schools will need to develop new partnerships and joint commitments to a democratic profession of teaching based on shared accountability for teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2000b).

With regard to modes of delivery of professional development for in-career teachers, obviously university-based certified programmes play an important part in Ireland and elsewhere (Sugrue, *et al*, 2001). Other modes of delivery have also proved effective. For example, findings from a study in the UK indicate that computer conferencing has the potential to facilitate the professional development of teachers as reflective practitioners

and researchers. However, they also point to barriers to student participation that must be addressed. These include access issues related to time constraints, unfamiliarity with the medium, and lack of confidence in expressing personal views in a public arena (Wearmouth *et al*, 2004).

Commentators have identified mainstream-special school partnerships as a way of disseminating expertise built up by experienced teachers. A study in England provides some evidence that a mainstream-special school partnership can be an effective model for promoting inclusion at primary level. A key element in this study was the role of an 'inclusion team' in providing skilled, direct support to the mainstream schools, regular contact with mainstream staff and being available when needed (Gibb *et al*, 2007). A study of head teachers in Northern Ireland found that those in mainstream schools showed wholehearted commitment to the philosophy and practice of inclusion, and could critically examine what they have achieved so far. They recognised persistent and varied constraints, however, within and beyond their schools. Head teachers in the special sector perceived their schools to have a multiple role in providing for pupils with the greatest need, reintegrating those on placement into their regular schools, and offering outreach support to mainstream colleagues (Abbott, 2006). Further study would be valuable in this regard.

A reflection from an Australian study of schools working under challenging circumstances (Johnston & Hayes, 2007) provides useful insights. Social justice, this study argues, matters in education and it matters most when students struggle to complete and succeed at school. Their research suggests that it is necessary to 'unsettle' default modes of operation in order to replace them with new settlements about what is to be valued, taught and expected in schools. If the initial impetus or change is to keep moving, then it has to come into contact with fresh sources of energy all the time (ibid).

To summarise, international research shows the importance of teacher education in effecting change and moving to more inclusive systems. There is evidence that, to facilitate this change, inclusive/special needs education needs to be embedded in initial teacher education programmes, in induction and in continuing professional development programmes. Teachers need to be made aware of the 'dilemma of difference' in the delivery of programmes. This can be addressed through ensuring that teacher education

programmes are critical and reflective and 'unsettle' traditional modes of operation. While accountability is essential, an emphasis on 'democratic professionalism' which enhances teacher professionalism has been identified as a way to avoid the negative effects of an excessive emphasis on performativity. Different modes of delivery of professional development for teachers have been found to be effective. However, higher education institutions have a crucial role to play at all stages of teacher education from initial, through induction, to continuing in-career professional education. Having considered the international findings on teacher education for special educational needs, we will now turn to consider the existing evidence from the Republic of Ireland.

1.8 Teacher Education for Disabilities and Special Educational Needs in Ireland

On foot of the changes in legislation in Ireland, the Department of Education and Science has designed policies relating to special educational needs and has supported a move towards inclusive education for children with special educational needs – see Department of Education and Science circulars 20-90 (DES, 1990) and SP ED 02/05 (see Department of Education & Science, 1970-present). All DES circulars relating to special educational needs are available at http://www.sess.ie/documents-and-publications/circulars. These changes in policy and legislation have resulted in an increase in children with special educational needs in inclusive school settings at primary and secondary level.

As we have seen earlier, it is helpful to think of teacher education as comprising three phases. The first is initial teacher education which occurs before entry to the teaching profession; the second, induction, is when teachers begin their teaching career; and the third phase is subsequent in-career professional development. Virtually all of Ireland's initial teacher education courses contain modules on special educational needs (Shevlin & Kearns, 2006) thus ensuring that future teachers are attuned to the task of teaching a diversity of students. Teacher education in the induction phase is a recent development in Ireland and currently being piloted hence not available to all teachers. However, through research, SEN has been identified as a priority concern for induction programmes and beginning teachers are offered input in this area (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006). In contrast, the third phase of teacher education is characterised by widely

available opportunities to engage in teacher education in SEN. Currently, professional development in special educational needs is offered by course providers ranging from government-funded, third-level postgraduate degrees to commercial online certificates. The courses offered by third-level institutions are formally accredited while others are subjected to varying degrees of scrutiny and evaluation.

At present, the DES-recognised professional qualification for teachers working in SEN is a one-year full-time postgraduate diploma provided by universities and colleges of education. Other diploma courses in SEN exist, offered on a part-time basis by various institutions. Additionally, there are taught degrees at masters' level and research-based masters and doctoral programmes.

Short courses, some certified, in special needs teacher education are provided by the Special Education Support Service (SESS) established by the DES in 2003. Among other activities, this initiative provides assistance to teachers and schools in the form of individual teacher/school in-service and regional in-service. Further assistance, in whole-school planning for SEN, is available through the DES primary and post-primary school development planning initiatives. Additional help is available through curriculum and classroom practice oriented support programmes provided by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) and Primary Support Programme (PSP) both funded by the DES. Teacher unions also provide courses for teachers in special needs.

Another source of information accessible to teachers is the commercially produced SEN online courses that are part-funded by the DES. Numerous other distance education options are available from universities and institutes of education within and outside of Ireland. On occasion, the DES may part-fund these courses if deemed appropriate. Overall, provision of professional development in SEN is characterised by a diversity of providers and a range of certified and non-certified options. As we have seen, internationally and in Ireland, the body of literature and research in inclusive education is growing. In Ireland, its dominant focus has been at an operational level, exploring school and curriculum adaptations (ESAI, 2005). In contrast, the continuing professional development of teachers in developing knowledge, skills and expertise to teach students with special educational needs effectively has been under-researched in Ireland.

1.9 The Research Project – Professional Development for Teachers Working in Special Education/ Inclusion in Mainstream Schools

1.9.1 Research aims

The main aim of this research was to identify the professional development needs of special education teachers working in mainstream schools. An associated aim was to identify the teachers' roles in responding to changing educational circumstances. These aspects were explored through research conducted with key stakeholders in special education and through a review of current literature pertinent to the area.

1.9.2 Overview of the research project

The project comprised four phases which though conceptually distinct overlapped chronologically. Phase one consisted of a literature review on issues relating to inclusion, teacher education and professional development in special needs teaching and also an appraisal of previous research in the field. This informed the development of the research instruments, the questionnaire, which was the main instrument, the focus group schedules and the interview schedules. Phase two consisted of gathering the data. This entailed printing and distributing the postal questionnaire, checking returns, identifying non-responders and resending questionnaires. Focus groups with parents and teachers were another element of this phase and explored aspects of parents' and teachers' perspectives in inclusion. Interviews with a range of key stakeholders were also conducted during this stage of the project. Phase three comprised cleaning and coding the returned questionnaires, entering data and the analysis of the data. The final phase was devoted to writing the research report, extracting key findings and formulating evidence-based recommendations.

2 Research Design, Method, Sample, Development of Research Tools

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to explore the professional development requirements of learning support/resource teachers working in mainstream schools with students who have additional educational needs. The rationale for the project derives from the recent changes in special education provision in Ireland. Increasing numbers of children with special needs attend mainstream schools. It is essential to ensure that these schools cater for all such students in helping them achieve their maximum potential and enabling them to take an active part in the social, cultural and economic life of our country. Previous research has demonstrated that teachers are an important factor in the quality of pupil learning (OECD, 2005) and it is crucial that the most vulnerable children in our society have access to the best possible teaching.

2.1.1 Aims and objectives

The research had two broad aims: to identify the professional development requirements of such mainstream special education teachers and to identify the main roles undertaken by teachers working with students who have special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. To explore these topics, data on the following aspects were gathered.

- The areas of knowledge and skill that teachers perceived as important for their current and future work arising from their roles as special education teachers.
- Information on the school context including the school catchment area, school catchment type, pupil and teacher characteristics.
- The major roles and functions of the learning support/resource teachers in relation to their work as identified by a sample of teachers and principals in the primary and post-primary sectors.

2.1.2 Research participants

The main target population was the most senior mainstream primary and post-primary teachers working in learning support/resource posts in mainstream schools. Contributory stakeholders from whom information was sought were principals, students, parents and policy-makers. Unfortunately, for ethical reasons, it proved difficult to access both parent and student populations. Hence, the research conducted with parents took place at a late stage of the research process and was confined to focus groups. For this reason, data from parents contributes solely to descriptive analysis and will be considered in detail in a separate publication. Accessing students within the strictures of ethical procedures and the set timeframe was not feasible with the outcome that their voice is unheard in this report.

Rationale for Broad Range of Research Participants

While teachers were the focus of this research, it was considered important to provide additional perspectives on their professional development needs and aspects of their roles and responsibilities. A teacher is one part of a large complex organisation. The school community and the broader education system all contribute to the culture of schooling that affects the individual student (Dyson 2001, Booth & Ainscow 2002). Consequently, viewpoints both internal and external to the school were sought to explore aspects of the topic of inclusive special education. Within schools, teachers' and principals' opinions were elicited through a questionnaire survey and through interviews. Research has suggested that the principal's support for inclusion is one of the main factors determining its success (Hines, 2008; Horrocks et al, 2007; Idol, 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). External viewpoints were elicited through interviews with a range of stakeholders working in the education system in professional support and policy development for special education. In an era of change, such as the move from segregated to inclusive education, it is necessary to engage all components of the education system (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Fullan, 2004). In acknowledging the unique contribution that each of four different layers can contribute, the views of a broad base of participants representing societal, system, school and classroom perspectives, were sought for this research.

2.1.3 Research design

Two methodological options exist when considering what approach to take when researching a topic. Whether to use a quantitative approach, which deduces information

and understanding from empirical evidence, or whether to use a qualitative approach, which induces information and understanding from examining patterns and their meaning (Gall *et al*, 2007). There are overlaps between the two and each has benefits that can be maximised and disadvantages that can be minimised through a combined approach. Although purists argue it is not possible to combine both approaches as they stem from radically different philosophical bases, Creswell (2003) argues that pragmatism provides the epistemological foundation for mixed methods. A decision was taken to adopt a pluralistic approach and to capture qualitative and quantitative data to ensure the complexities of the real world of inclusive education could be studied.

There exists a variety of techniques through which data can be gathered, each has its merits and defects (Oppenheim, 1992). In choosing a technique, two critical factors are the appropriateness of the technique to achieve the answers to the research questions and the resources of time and cost available to the researcher. In this research, three data collection techniques were used: the exploratory survey approach; the focus group approach; and the semi-structured interview approach.

The research project began in January 2007 with a preliminary literature review and the design and piloting of the research instruments. The fieldwork began in May 2007 and continued to June 2008. For the survey, a postal questionnaire was used. As a method of data collection the questionnaire permits the possibility of accessing a wide geographical area. It also enables question structures to elicit information: dichotomous questions enabling comparisons; Likert-type rating scales to allow for a degree of sensitivity and differentiation in responding to queries; open questions to encourage a range of personal views to be expressed; and ranking questions to promote distinctions between items. A particularly notable feature of the questionnaire when such question types are used is the ease of processing the data and the availability of a variety of statistical packages for analysing the results and for presenting the information in various formats. A difficulty associated with using postal questionnaires is a poor response rate that may result in bias. Other difficulties associated with questionnaires are control over who responds to the questionnaire, the order in which the questions are answered and the incompleteness of questionnaires. A further limitation is that there is no opportunity to expand on the responses and to clarify queries and answers. For this project, some of these difficulties linked with postal questionnaires were addressed by

sending reminders to increase the response rate and through use of additional research approaches to explore aspects of the questionnaire in greater depth. In this study, the core research instrument, a detailed survey via a postal questionnaire, yielding both qualitative and quantitative data was complemented by two other research instruments: hosting focus groups; and conducting face-to-face and telephone interviews.

The decision to undertake focus-group research was based on a literature review of the various methodology options (Cohen *et al*, 2007; Gall *et al*, 2007; Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Stainback & Stainback, 1992). This type of research was felt to afford a means of gaining critical insight into shared understanding. A focus group is defined as 'a small gathering of individuals who have a common interest or characteristic, assembled by a moderator, who uses the group and its interactions as a way to gain information about a particular issue' (Williams & Katz, 2001). Krueger and Casey identify a key characteristic of the focus group as a situation which is 'relaxed, comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions' (Krueger & Casey, 2000). An additional positive feature of focus-group research is the possibility for participants to develop a community of practice with others facing similar challenges. This feature, and the sense of empowerment that accompanies having one's opinions valued and respected, was an aspiration for the use of focus groups with the parents and teachers participating in this research.

For the face-to-face and telephone interviews, the semi-structured interview method was adopted. This is appropriate for collection of qualitative data and, with open-ended questions, allows for great flexibility, thus leading to in-depth probing and expansion of ideas (Drever, 1995). It also offers opportunities for ideas to surface which may not have been part of the original framework of reference and assists in exploring what interviewees' beliefs are (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Other strengths of the interview approach are its simplicity and its flexibility in that it can be adapted to suit the particularities of each situation and its validity. The telephone interviews were important in ensuring that a wide geographical spread of opinion was included in the research. Difficulties associated with travel-time, busy schedules and unforeseen interruptions were eliminated through telephone interviews.

2.1.4 Project management

The research team consisted of a principal investigator and a research officer, both of whom combined work on the project with other university duties. The research project and project management team were supported by UCD Research (comprising the Office of the Vice-President for Research and the Office of Funded Research Support Services). The project was also able to avail of the services of the university Bursar's Office and the Financial Manager of the College of Human Sciences. Technical elements of the project were subcontracted, such as the transcription of focus group and interview recordings and the input of survey data. A research consultant contributed to the expertise of the project team. An advisory board was established consisting of representatives from UCD School of Education, the DES SEN section, ILSA and IATSE. The research team met the advisory board at the initial, midway and final stages of the project. Two interim reports were submitted to the part-funding body – the NCSE – and a progress meeting was held with the NCSE head of research.

2.2 Instrumentation

The research utilised a mixed-methods design in that both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research were adopted to explore teacher professional development in special educational needs and inclusion. Through using quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research incorporated the most valuable features of each method.

The postal survey mainly utilised a quantitative approach and the use of focus groups and interviews allowed the inclusion of qualitative data. Thus, an extensive bank of data was gathered in view of which not all questionnaire responses and information from the interviews and focus groups contributed to this report.

2.2.1 Survey

A questionnaire was designed to gather information from teachers and principals. This design process was undertaken over a five-month period and the questionnaire underwent modifications in response to feedback from individuals and pilot trials. The questionnaire content was informed by literature on the topics of special education and inclusion and professional development, and also by previous, similar survey research carried out by the researchers.

The final questionnaire contained three main sections:

- Questions relating to descriptions of the school context school, student and teacher characteristics.
- Questions relating to the major roles and functions of the learning support/resource teachers.
- Questions relating to professional development for specialist LS/R teachers.

The questionnaire used a combination of different question types – open and closed questions, Likert-type rating scales and ranking scores. The open questions permitted any response the participants wished, the closed questions allowed only prescribed responses, the Likert-type scales allowed a degree of differentiation to be expressed in rating items and the rank order questions enforced discrimination between options.

To maximise the response rate, the questionnaire was confined to ten pages. In consequence, some breadth and detail of the survey research as originally envisaged was contracted but this was compensated for in three ways. First, a principals' questionnaire was added to the data collection instruments. Second, the number of questionnaires distributed, and the consequent expected return, was increased significantly to ensure that the emerging data represented the opinions of a broad range of teachers. Third, the areas covered in the interviews and focus groups were expanded to include elements withdrawn from the questionnaire.

2.2.2 Interview

The interview schedule was designed over a period of two months which allowed for feedback from the advisory board. A semi-structured interview format was adopted. All interviews were conducted via a common main schedule with adaptations for various stakeholders. The main interview schedule was piloted and further alterations made in response to recommendations. The interview schedule was divided in three sections and contained 20 questions. The first section focused on past and future professional development in special education; the second consisted of questions on the roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers and the last contained general questions pertaining to perceptions of special education and its provision. Each interview lasted from a half an hour to one hour depending on the length of the interviewee's responses.

2.2.3 Focus group

Separate focus groups for teachers and parents were convened for semi-structured discussions. A differentiated interview schedule with common elements was devised for each sector. For teachers, the areas included discussion points eliciting the main challenges they faced in carrying out the role of the LS/R teacher, the professional development needed for the role and their preferred options for accessing professional development. For parents, the topics included the main challenges facing children with special needs in mainstream schools, suggestions on how schools and LS/R teachers can best help children with special needs, the role of the LS/R teacher and type of training needed for that role. It was emphasised that parents should only speak about general education experience rather than specific experience with individual schools or teachers. An accompanying information sheet outlined the study's nature and purpose and provided space for notes on the main points discussed.

2.2.4 Sample

One criterion by which research is judged is the suitability of the sampling strategy used (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Key factors here are sample size, the representativeness of the sample, access to the sample and the sampling strategy used. These factors informed the decisions on the research sample. The main target population was mainstream primary and post-primary teachers working in learning support/resource posts in mainstream schools. The additional stakeholders from whom information was sought were principals, students, parents and policy-makers. Unfortunately, for ethical reasons, it proved difficult to access the student population with the outcome that their voice is unheard in this report.

Questionnaire Sample

In the original research proposal, a sample of 350 teachers was proposed for the questionnaire. At this stage, a proportional stratified random sample was envisaged which would return sufficient questionnaires for comparative analysis. However, detailed school information was required to create a proportional stratified sample. This information on school type was unavailable to the project despite searching the Department of Education and Science and other related websites and contacting research agencies. This lack of information was unfortunate, as it would have assisted in

determining statistically viable numbers of cases for each pertinent variable such as socio-economic status, disadvantage status, and rural and urban catchment.

Budgetary and time constraints did not allow for a complete census of both sectors. This would have entailed significant extra cost in the printing and distributing of over 4,000 questionnaires and additional work in the coding of increased number of returns. In consequence, a decision was taken to conduct a random sample of primary schools. The required sample size varies in relation to the type of analysis to be undertaken (Cohen et al, 2007). In general, co-relational research requires an absolute minimum of 30 cases and survey research 100 cases in the major subgroups. For a probability sample with a 95 per cent confidence level and 5 per cent confidence interval, the random sample size for 3,290 primary schools was calculated at 344, using an online sample calculation software package (Creative Research Systems, 2008). It was anticipated that by sending out 760 questionnaires and forecasting a response rate of 45 per cent (a rate achieved by the research officer in previous survey research in the area) this sample of 344 would be achieved. The random sample of the primary sector was achieved using a software package ZRandom, downloaded from the internet and applied to the list of 3,290 primary schools. Subsequently, the first 760 primary schools resulting from the ZRandom sample were used. It was decided to distribute a comparable number of postprimary questionnaires as this would provide a census of the sector and additional, indepth research of this sector was planned as part of a parallel project. Through this sampling technique, it was anticipated that there would be sufficient returns to provide adequate numbers of cases for a comparative analysis of relevant variables.

Thus, just under 1,500 schools were included in the teachers' sample – 760 primary and 732 post-primary. The same schools were used to distribute a second questionnaire for the principals. Hence, the total number of individuals included in the research project sample was 2,986. This significantly exceeded the sample of 350 projected in the research proposal. The consequences, as cogently suggested by Cohen *et al* (2007: 102) in terms of the additional costs involved – time, financial, stress, administrative and resource – would be far-reaching.

Furthermore, due to the undifferentiated nature of the DES primary database, a number of returns were received from Gaeltacht and special schools although the target population did not contain these sectors. Because of their exceptional characteristics, these schools were not included in the database for the analysis.

In view of the difficulties experienced with accessing information on schools, a most welcome innovation is the recent publication by the statistics section of the DES of a matrix of education-related data sources. This prototype is to be updated and expanded periodically with additions from the DES and agencies under its aegis (DES Statistics, 2008).

Sample – focus groups

The data collected through focus-group research encompassed the views of seven teacher groups and three parent groups. The selection of participants for teacher and parent focus groups involved purposeful sampling (Gall *et al*, 2007) and an element of self-selection was also involved given the need for informed consent. Efforts were made to ensure that rural and urban sectors were represented, that there was a variety of socioeconomic categories, and that both primary and post-primary sectors were included.

For the teacher focus groups, arrangements were made to use a Dublin-based and provincial-based teacher education centre. In one centre, the advent of a teacher support network was used to invite teachers to participate in the focus groups and, in the other, invitations to participate in the focus groups were posted to teachers in the area. To further the representativeness of the teacher sample, use was made of a national conference. A general invitation was issued orally to participants at the plenary session, flyers were included in the conference pack and information posters placed strategically around the venue.

The parent groups were contacted through parish community centres and parent support groups. This resulted in a rural primary parents' focus group, an urban primary parents' focus group and a rural post-primary focus group.

Sample – interview

Participants in the interview research were drawn from schools and the wider education system. The interviews took place either in face-to-face settings or over the telephone.

The duration of the interviews varied between half an hour and an hour and a quarter with no marked difference in the length of face-to-face or telephone interviews.

In total, 31 interviews were conducted with a range of key participants. The sample for the interviews included primary and post-primary teachers and principals; course providers of professional development in special education; and personnel from the Special Education Support Service, the National Council for Special Education and Department of Education and Science.

The selection of participants for the teacher interviews involved purposeful sampling and maximum variation sampling. Consideration was also given to distance and time.

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked if they were interested in contributing further to the research project. Following input into a computer database, cells containing the contact details of teachers responding 'yes' were collated into primary or post-primary files. These were then sorted into geographical areas and randomly ordered. Teachers from each group were then contacted according to the details given. To reduce the suggestion of coercion, e-mail and mobile-phone texts were the dominant procedures used to contact teachers. Teachers were given the opportunity to decline through the 'none' response or were asked to reply if they still wished to participate in the interviews. Teachers who gave a telephone landline were contacted directly or left a message. In all, 22 teacher interviews were conducted.

2.3 Data Collection

2.3.1 Number of questionnaires distributed and returned

Two questionnaire types were distributed: one for teachers and one for principals. The questionnaires sent out numbered 2,986. The quantity returned included some which were omitted from the main datasets as they were either deemed outside the remit of the research project, were substantially incomplete or were incorrectly completed.

Table 2-1 *Questionnaires distributed and returned*

Questionnaires sent out	Primary		Post-primary		
Teachers	760		733		
Principals	760		733		
Sector total	1,520		1,466		
Total	2,986				
Questionnaires returned and included in analysis	Primary		Post-Primary		
Teachers	417	54.87%	399	55.20%	
Principals	196	25.90%	212	29.30%	
Sector total	613		611		
Total	1,224*				

^{*}Note: The principals and teachers provided data on 816 schools – 417 at primary level and 399 at post-primary level.

To achieve a response rate that enabled a variety of statistical analyses to be undertaken, the teacher questionnaire was reissued four times. The principals' questionnaire was sent only once as considerable experience with the schools on the part of the research team had indicated that, given the very high workloads of principals, repeat postings would be unlikely to result in substantially higher results. On each occasion it was issued, the questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the research and a stamped addressed envelope was included.

In summary, questionnaires were sent to all post-primary schools and to a sample of primary schools in Ireland. The questionnaire was initially addressed to the learning support/resource/SENCO with a covering letter. Reminders were sent to all selected schools to increase the response rate. On the third reminder/re-issue, schools which responded were sent a thank-you letter addressed to the principal along with a principal's questionnaire. Schools which did not respond were sent a pack addressed to the principal. Each pack distributed contained a covering letter to the principal and another to the main learning support/resource /SENCO and two questionnaires, one addressed to the principal and one directed to the teacher with main responsibility for learning support/resource/ special educational needs in the school. Responses were received from 196 primary school principals and 212 post-primary principals, and from

417 primary and 399 post-primary LS/R teachers, yielding information on 816 schools. Given the busy schedules of principals, the most detailed questions on the schools were contained in the questionnaires directed to the LS/R teachers. Their responses contained details on the schools, teaching and learning environments, students with special and learning support needs, numbers of support teachers, and their own professional experience and needs.

2.3.2 Data collection – number of focus groups and interviews

The data from 31 interviews and 10 focus groups contribute to the analysis. Table 2-2 details contributors and the associated references used in the qualitative data analysis.

 Table 2-2 Qualitative data source and references used in text

Interviews (31)	References used	Focus groups (10)	References used
Teachers (22)		Teachers (7)	
Primary (8)	PT1	Primary (5)	BPT1
•	PT2	BPT1 (5 teachers)	BPT2
Telephone interviews	PT3	BPT2 (4 teachers)	BPT3
1 to 8	PT4	BPT3 (4 teachers)	GPT1
	PT5	GPT1 (4 teachers)	GPT2
7 female teachers	PT6	GPT2 (4 teachers)	
1 male teacher	PT7	All female	
	PT8		
Post-primary (14)	PPT1	Post-primary	DPPT & PT1
• • • •	PPT2	& primary mixed (2)	DPPT & PT2
Telephone interviews	PPT3		
1 to 12	PPT4	DPPT & PT1 (6 teachers)	
	PPT5	5 female; 1 male	
Face to face interviews	PPT6		
13 and 14	PPT7	DPPT & PT2 (2 teachers)	
	PPT8	2 female	
13 female teachers	PPT9		
1 male teacher	PPT10		
	PPT11		
	PPT12		
	PPT13		
	PPT14		
Principals (2)		Parents (3)	
Primary	PPrin1	Parents of primary	PaRuPT1
Face-to-face interview		students	
(Male)		5 (4 mothers; 1 father)	
		Parents of primary students	
		(8 mothers)	PaUrPK1
Post-primary	PPPrin	Parents of post-primary	PaRuPPT2
Face-to-face interview		students	
(Female)		4 (3 mothers; 1 father)	
Stakeholders (7)	S1		
	S2		
1 to 5 Telephone	S 3		
interviews	S4		
	S5		
2,3,4,6 and 7	S6		
Face-to-face interviews	S7		

2.3.3 Data collection – focus group

The same research officer facilitated all focus groups ensuring consistency of practice. Two types of procedures were utilised: participant-led focus groups and researcher-led focus groups. In both instances, the same verbal and written information on the ethical and procedural guidelines was given to participants and the same schedule of discussion questions was followed. In researcher-led focus groups, the researcher sat with the group and facilitated progression through the focus group schedule. In participant-led focus groups, the researcher circulated around several groups, facilitating the groups' progress. Participant-led focus groups were used with a view to minimising researcher bias (Powney & Watts, 1987), to decreasing 'reactivity' where the presence of the observer affects behaviour (Gall et al, 2007), and to maximise the opportunities for a larger number of teachers to contribute their viewpoints. While the data gathered from all focus groups was insightful, despite written and verbal guidelines exhorting equal air-time to allow all group members to contribute, participant-led focus groups tended towards a less balanced representation of each of the group members' views with the voices of more dominant personalities prevailing. Overall, more differing perspectives were noted in the researcher-led focus groups.

The suggestions on the preparation for and conducting of focus groups enumerated by Krueger and Casey (2000) informed the organisation of the focus groups. Great attention was paid to ensuring that ethical guidelines were followed and all participants were aware of the nature and purpose of groups and informed of their rights. A three-stage approach to convening focus groups was utilised to ensure participants were fully informed before consenting to participation. First, descriptions of the nature, purpose and procedures of the focus groups were given to potential contributors. This initial contact took one of four forms in seeking expressions of interest. Target groups of teachers and parents already participating in special needs education networks were informally contacted via intermediaries who gave verbal descriptions of the project; open invitations were displayed in public spaces of schools, parish centres, teacher education centres and at a teachers' conference and, fourth, a postal invitation to LS/R teachers was issued to all schools in the catchment area of a provincial education centre. The second stage followed on from the initial expression of interest and entailed information containing written particulars on the project, the areas for discussion and

informed consent details being distributed either by post or in person. All participants were assured that they had the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and some teachers exercised this right. The third and final stage of ensuring the research conformed with ethical procedures took place before the focus group discussion began. The researcher outlined the project's nature and purpose, the recording procedures involved, assurances of anonymity and use and future storage of the data.

On arrival, focus group participants were offered tea and biscuits, names were matched with the list of persons expressing interest and where sufficient numbers warranted it, participants were organised into primary and post-primary groups. Following the researcher's presentation on the project and guidelines on the procedures, the discussion took place, either research-led or participant-led. Care was taken to ensure that each group directed their discussion in accordance with the guidelines and the researcher acted as facilitator. At the end of the discussion, participants agreed on the main points and noted these in written format. Finally, participants were thanked for their contributions and further refreshments were offered with opportunities for informal conversation.

Two teacher groups were withdrawn from the original eight. In one situation, an unregistered latecomer joined a group and later expressed concerns about being recorded. In another, participants were anxious for information on recent developments in SEN-related areas and the session became a workshop responding to the teachers' needs. This resulted in insufficient time being available to discuss the research questions as both the venue and participants were unavailable to extend the duration of the gathering. An unanticipated benefit for participants in the focus groups was that in those instances where ad hoc groups were formed, the participating teachers found the group meeting invaluable and further meetings were planned which subsequently resulted in support networks for LS/R teachers being established in rural areas.

The benefits and disadvantages of focus groups research highlighted in the literature (Gall *et al*, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2000) were in evidence during this research. High costs were associated with organising focus groups – venue costs, travel and subsistence costs for the researcher and book tokens for participants travelling a distance. There was also a high time-cost factor in organising and conducting the different sessions for

parents and teachers. Furthermore, the audio quality of the focus group recordings was varied and difficult to transcribe. Despite these negative elements, both teacher and parent focus groups were extremely worthwhile and the insights offered invaluable. The richness of discussion associated with researcher-led focus groups, however, did not always emerge to the same degree from the participant-directed groups. In the participant-led focus groups, one or two individual's experiences tended to dominate to the detriment of the group discussion. The need for the researcher's presence with a focus group limited the quantity that could be conducted within the timeframe.

2.3.4 Data collection – interview research

Both face-to-face and telephone interviews took place. All eight primary teacher interviews and 12 of the post-primary interviews took place over the phone. Both principal interviews and five stakeholder interviews were face to face. All participants gave their informed consent either via a signed written agreement or after permission was requested and agreed, consent was digitally recorded. Field notes were also taken during both types of interview in case of technical failure or misadventure. Face-to-face interviews took place at times and in locations identified as convenient by the interviewees and were digitally recorded. The telephone interviews were also organised to suit the participants and a telephone device used to facilitate recording. Both forms of interview have advantages and disadvantages (Borg & Gall, 1979). While it is easier to establish rapport in face-to-face situations, the physical presence of an interviewer may be a deterrent. In phone interviews, the absence of non-verbal communication cues can be problematic. However, the experience during this research project was that rich data was collected using both methods but that the telephone interviews were more focused and provided better audio quality which aided transcription.

2.3.5 Ethical considerations

Research Ethics

The research was conducted under the aegis of the UCD Research Ethics Committee and adhered to the strictures and guidelines stipulated. A detailed outline of the research was submitted to the committee and approval was granted for all aspects of the research. Informed consent was sought from all focus group and interview participants and confidentiality was guaranteed at all times. All data was kept in a secure place and identifying details were stored separately. Quotations from and references to

individuals, schools and agencies are anonymous throughout the report (see **Appendix 1 Ethical Considerations**). The ethical procedures involved in focus group interviews have been outlined above.

2.4 Data Analysis

The research employed a mixed methods approach utilising quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data derived from the questionnaire and the qualitative data from the questionnaire and the interviews and focus groups.

2.4.1 Quantitative data analysis

Data from the survey were initially entered into an Excel database where all numerical and textual responses could be collected in their original format. Subsequently, these were entered into SPSS version 12. A code book was created as an aide memoire for the data input and codes used. Later, a list of analysis carried out was developed in the course of the analysis. The reliability of the data from rating scores was checked using the Cronbach-Alpha co-efficient. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, Mann-Whitney U tests for independent samples, Spearman's Rank Order Correlation, and chi-squares were used to explore the data and compare groups.

2.4.2 Qualitative data analysis

There were two sources of qualitative data. These were the written responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires and the oral data gathered during the focus groups discussions and the individual interviews. The data gathered from these processes were analysed using MAXQDA, a software package developed specifically for qualitative analysis. Using such software enables greater amounts of qualitative data to be processed and also enables a more thorough and detailed analysis of the data (Cohen *et al*, 2007). However, the software merely supports the researcher in organising data and, as with manual analysis of data, the decisions regarding code generation and categories remain the province of the researcher. The benefits accruing from the use of software for qualitative data analysis are the minimising of mechanical tasks and reducing the potential for human error in 'cut and paste' techniques.

Qualitative Data from the Questionnaire

Following the first stage of inputting all data from the questionnaires into Excel, the second stage required the written responses from the open-ended questions on the questionnaires to be converted from Excel files into Word documents and saved in rich text format. This format is suitable for export to qualitative data analysis software packages such as MAXQDA.

The teachers' and principals' questionnaires had several open-ended questions. These requested respondents to reflect on professional development for teachers in special educational needs. The open question included in this analysis focuses on teacher professional development.

Q2.1 What in-service/professional development do you need to carry out your work as a LS/Resource teacher effectively? List your four most urgent inservice/professional development needs.

The question on the principals' questionnaire was similar.

Q4 In your opinion in what areas do the LS/Resource/SEN teacher(s) in your school require in-service/professional development? List a maximum of their four most urgent in-service/professional development needs.

The four sets of responses – from primary teachers, post-primary teachers, primary principals and post-primary principals – to the open question were exported as separate texts. This enabled analysis to take place at the question level and allowed for the comparison of teachers' and principals' responses and comparison of primary and post-primary level responses. In all, there were about 1,200 text segments to be analysed for this section of the research project.

Once opened in MAXQDA, it was possible to begin coding the data. Initially, the process used mirrored that of manual coding where each segment is analysed and assigned a code. Although this is time consuming, it is an important step in becoming familiar with the data. A process utilising the software's lexical search feature can also

be adopted to progress the analyses. Here, series of words associated with each code, which emerged from the initial scrutiny of the text, were used to find other occurrences and these segments could then be similarly coded (Kuckartz, 2007).

In this way, themes emerging from the transcripts were noted, coded and grouped under appropriate headings. Themes common to a number of transcripts were duly awarded particular significance.

Qualitative Data Analysis from the Focus Groups and Interviews

The purpose of gathering the qualitative data was to contextualise the data emerging from the quantitative analysis and to paint a verbal picture of the lived experience of teachers' professional lives. Hence, in this section of the research project, the qualitative data is not perceived as an instrument of triangulation for verifying the quantitative data but rather as offering perspectives on participants' day-to-day practices in their work with students identified as having special educational needs.

Source of Oral Qualitative Data

In all, 38 texts emerged from the interactions with the participant groups – teachers and stakeholders. Table 2-3 indicates the sources and quantity of data analysed.

Table 2-3 Source of qualitative data

Text Origin	Number of texts
Primary teacher interviews	8
Post-primary teacher interviews	14
Teacher focus groups	7
Subtotal (A)	(29)
Principal interviews (2)	2
Stakeholder interviews (7)	7
Subtotal (B)	(9)
Total	38

2.4.3 Methodology of oral qualitative data analysis

The oral qualitative data was gathered through focus groups, interviews and telephone interviews with stakeholders. Following transcription, the texts derived from participants' interviews were subjected to a series of procedures, both traditional and computer-based, to reduce the data to 'manageable and comprehensible proportions' (Cohen *et al*, 2007).

Difficulties associated with the analysis of qualitative data can be avoided if due care is taken in the analytic process. The problem of bias and the predisposition to self-fulfilling selection by researchers can be pre-empted by adopting recommended qualitative data-analysis techniques (Gall *et al*, 2007) and consistency in interpretation can be ensured through undertaking a systematic set of procedures (Seale, 2007; Silverman, 2004). These suggestions fashioned the guidelines informing the procedures undertaken in this project.

A set of transcripts was selected and given to three researchers who read the transcripts and separately identified themes. Participant statements illustrative of the themes were shared and themes clarified. The transcripts were then reread to determine if the themes were replicated throughout the sample and to confirm, expand or introduce themes. A final overview of the major themes emerged. The qualitative data were then set aside for a period of time to permit a fresh analysis of the data to take place. Following the time lapse, a second round of analysis and reflection was conducted by one of the researchers. The dominant themes from this analysis were listed. These were compared with the previous theme overviews and refinements made. The texts were further analysed by identifying units of meaning and ascribing a code, related to the major themes, to each unit (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The subsequent themes and codes were then used by the researcher to code the transcripts using MAXQDA, a computer software package enabling text segments to be labelled and collocated according to codes reflecting the sub-themes. The use of such software reduces the risk of human error in retrieval and computation but does not perform analysis on the text, merely supports it (Cohen et al, 2007). This computer assisted coding was compared to the previous manual coding and codes were refined and or made redundant as indicated to amend inconsistencies. In this way, the data were triangulated to verify the interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Thus, the procedures undertaken in analysing the qualitative data were differentiated by time, personnel and methodology. This resulted in a rigorous process, which strove to permit claims of reliability and validity of the findings (Weber, 1990).

Terminology Used

The theoretical position in relation to the definition of disability and special educational needs adopted in this report reflects the 'social model' of disability and references the work of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996). This report adopts the Commission's view that the principles underlying policy should be those of participation, rights and equality. The social model of disability argues that people with accredited or perceived impairments are disabled by society's failure to accommodate their needs (Barnes *et al*, 2002: 5). The working definitions of the terms 'disability', 'special educational needs' and 'inclusion' used in this report were taken from the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities' *Report of the Education Working Group* (1996). In this report, 'disability' is understood as:

Children and adults with physical mental, intellectual or sensory impairment and who, due to lack of receptiveness and adaptability in existing educational structure and otherwise, encounter obstacles to participation on equal and equally effective terms with all other children and adults

Education Working Group, 1996: 15.

The term 'special educational need' is understood as:

Special learning needs which require a range of support in order to enable a pupil or student to achieve his or her full potential for learning and learning outcomes. The range of supports could include curriculum adjustment, counselling and guidance, specialist equipment or facilities, modified teaching techniques, paramedical services, or any other support needed to maximise learning.

The meaning of the term 'inclusion' is based on a paraphrase of the working group

report and is understood to mean:

Inclusion is about accommodating the needs of all students in the

mainstream ... and the positive action measures necessary to bring that

about.

Inclusion means a respect for difference coupled with an acceptance of

difference and the recognition that difference is an essential part of the

existence of the 'whole'.

ibid: 19-20

The term learning support/resource (LS/R) teacher refers to a teacher or teachers with

specific responsibility for students with special educational needs. While there has been

some separation of the two roles in the past, current practice indicates that the groups of

students taught by LS/R teachers overlapped. The use of LS/R has the desired

connotations of teachers teaching all students with special educational needs at both

primary and post-primary level.

2.5 Conclusion

A mixed-methods approach to data collection was considered the most appropriate

framework to achieve the aims of this research. The analysis was conducted with due

consideration of the desired outcomes and the time available. Computer-based

analytical software was utilised where appropriate. The ethical guidelines from the UCD

Research Ethics Committee were adhered to at all stages of the research (see Appendix

1 Ethical Considerations).

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3 Results

Overview

This chapter is divided in three main sections. Part one consists of information on the background of participating schools and teachers; part two contains details on perceptions of LS/R teachers' roles and responsibilities; and part three consists of the perspective of a range of key stakeholders on the professional development requirements of teachers.

This research aims to explore the professional development requirements of teachers working in SEN/Inclusion in mainstream schools at post primary and primary level. To do so, information pertaining to the main responsibilities of teachers working in this area was gathered and this information forms the context for an exploration of the professional development required. Teachers' professional development requirements and their roles are contingent on the teaching/learning environment – and, therefore, details on the school, student and teacher background – were sought to provide a framework for the research results.

The information contributing to this research was collected from a range of sources utilising a variety of data-gathering instruments. Teachers and principals of primary and post-primary schools were sent postal questionnaires. Focus groups were held with teachers and parents. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with teachers, principals and significant stakeholders. Literature searches were conducted on topics pertinent to key issues. The main source of quantitative data stems from the questionnaire. The areas covered in the questionnaire are outlined in detail in Chapter 3. The qualitative data garnered from the interviews and focus groups are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.1 Results from the Questionnaire

Some questionnaire respondents did not answer all questions; others inadvertently spoiled their answers. In the tables, missing values are excluded from the distributions and from bi-variate analysis. Where there were any missing responses to one or more of the items comprising the scales, these were also recorded as 'missing'. This is the normal procedure attaching to the SPSS package and is reflected in the differing totals in the tables.

3.2 Part One: Description of the School Community

Overview

Part one of the questionnaire sought information on the teaching environment. The findings indicate a need for data reporting on numbers of students and teachers involved in special education, the streamlining of school procedures for resource/learning support teacher allocation, and greater emphasis on the development of school plans for inclusion and student education plans.

3.2.1 Introduction

Details collected here covered schools, students and teachers. This included the school level, school type, geographical and socio-economic catchment area, the school size, the gender mix, the number of full- and part-time LS/R teachers, the number of pupils receiving LS/R teaching, school policies and plans for SEN, IEPs, teacher experience, and teacher qualifications. The information provides a snapshot of the school environment in special education at this point in time. It creates a context for the analysis and discussion of the data and it offers different lenses for analysing the subsequent data on the roles and responsibilities and the professional development needs of learning support and resource teachers at primary and post-primary levels.

3.2.2 Description of teaching-learning environment

The questions seeking information relating to the teaching/learning environment were included in the teachers' questionnaire but not the principals' questionnaire. Hence, the figures correspond to the number of questionnaires returned by primary and post-primary teachers that met the criteria for inclusion in the dataset. There were returns

from 816 schools in total, 417 primary schools and 399 post-primary schools. The information on schools gathered from the questionnaires was first examined to determine how accurately the sample reflected the whole population. The second exploration of the data concentrated on features that described the school organisation, the third set of analyses focused on the student characteristics, and the fourth appraisal looked at teacher attributes. These four aspects of the analyses of the teaching-learning environment are used as the framework to present the findings for this section.

School Characteristics: Comparison of Sample with Whole Population

The schools in the dataset were compared to the whole-school population to determine how well the sample reflected its salient characteristics. Five different criteria were used in the comparison: geographical distribution; student gender mix; school size; school disadvantage status; and post-primary school type. Comparable data for these five characteristics were available for the whole-school population.

Geographical distribution of schools

The research sample contained a wide geographical spread of schools. Every county is represented in the dataset (see Appendix 1) with counties that have cities and high concentrations of urban population being represented by a proportionally higher percentage of schools than counties without large urban centres. The use of 26 counties as a variable for analytical purposes was unwieldy and a grouping criterion was sought. Unfortunately, in Ireland, there is no single accepted standard for geographical regions and differing divisions are used by the census statistics, by the Department of Education and Science, and by the Department of Health and others. This decreases the potential for comparison across a range of areas much to the detriment of research. As a compromise, province was used to aggregate the data: Dublin; Leinster, minus Dublin; Munster; Connacht; Ulster (RoI). Returns were received from all provinces. To compare with the national population, statistics from the DES 2005-2006 annual report were used. The numbers of schools in each county were aggregated to find the number of schools in each province and then each expressed as a percentage of the total population. In the main, the research sample is a good reflection of the overall distribution of schools in the provinces. Schools in Munster are under-represented in the sample while those in Connacht are over-represented, however.

Gender

The breakdown of the sample in terms of gender revealed a significant difference between primary and post-primary school returns in relation to the number of single-sex schools. At primary level, schools were more likely to be mixed than at post-primary. Most primary schools in the sample (86.5 per cent) were co-educational. This was similar to the national proportion of 83.2 per cent. Only half (53.5 per cent) of the schools at post-primary level were co-educational. The co-educational sector at second level was thus somewhat under-represented among respondents as the national figure is 64.8 per cent of the total. The proportion of single-sex schools at post-primary (a third) is a notable feature of the Irish education system and is relatively high internationally.

School size

The number of pupils in a school was one criteria used to determine how representative of the school population the schools included in the dataset were. Figures from the Department of Education and Science annual report 2005-06 were used as a basis to determine how faithful the sample reflected the mainstream population. DES statistics on school size show that about 39 per cent, of post-primary schools have over 500 pupils. This contrasts strongly with primary schools where schools with pupil numbers exceeding 500 only account for 2 per cent of schools. At the other end of the scale, schools with fewer than 50 pupils account for 21 per cent of primary schools and only 1 per cent of post-primary schools. The most common school size for primary schools is 50 to 100 pupils which accounts for 30 per cent of all schools.

The statistics on the school sizes of the research sample are broadly reflective of the national distribution with 43.5 per cent of the post-primary schools in the sample having over 500 pupils and 41.2 per cent of the primary sample having fewer than 100 pupils. Smaller post-primary schools are slightly less well represented among the returned questionnaires. Additionally, very small primary schools (under 50 pupils) are underrepresented. The proportion in the research sample is 12.9 per cent. This figure is less than the actual proportion of these very small schools in the primary sector. However, this may be accounted for by the fact that some teachers indicated they were shared LS/R teachers but they were requested to provide information on their base school only. Furthermore, the total number of pupils attending schools with fewer than 50 pupils is relatively small, thus the number of pupils with SEN attending mainstream schools who

are excluded from the sample by virtue of under representation of small schools, is relatively small. These factors must be borne in mind in considering the analysis. With the above exceptions, overall, the main school-size groups in both sectors are well represented.

Disadvantage status

The option to use socio-economic status as a variable offers potentially interesting analyses and interpretation of the support needs of the various socio-economic groups. However, the difficulty in relying on teacher's perceptions of socio-economic status was noted and this aspect of the school was explored primarily through a question on the 'disadvantage' status of the school. The ascribing of disadvantage status to a school lends formal recognition to schools operating in challenging socio-economic environments. In the questionnaire returns, one-quarter of the post-primary schools indicated that they had been accorded official 'disadvantage' status. In the primary sample, over one-fifth of the schools indicated they had disadvantage status.

School type

The broad spectrum of school types in the primary and post-primary Irish education system are represented in the research sample. National parish schools dominated the overall categories of respondents to the questionnaire at primary level and were overall the most numerous category. Voluntary secondary schools were the next most prominent category.

Post-primary sector – type of school

At post-primary level, the number of schools in the Department of Education and Science database available in 2007 was 732. Schools, mainly post Leaving Certificate course providers, which did not provide Junior Cycle curriculum, were omitted from the study. This resulted in a potential data source of 723 post-primary schools. The school types represented in the returns reflected the distribution of school types in the Department of Education and Science database. There was a slight under-representation of vocational schools and colleges, however. This should be noted given that this sector records high numbers of students with learning difficulties (DES, 2007a).

As statistics are available on the breakdown of schools in the post-primary sector, a comparison between the research sample and the whole sector is possible. An analysis of the distribution of post-primary schools nationally shows 54.5 per cent are secondary schools, 33 per cent are vocational and 12.5 per cent are community and comprehensive. This distribution was mirrored, by and large, in the research sample, with 54.8 per cent returns from the voluntary secondary sector, 29.6 per cent from the vocational education (VEC) sector, 14.0 per cent from the community and comprehensive sector and the remaining 1.5 per cent were in the 'other'/unknown category. Despite the somewhat lower rate of questionnaire returns from VEC schools, the 118 included in the data ensures the category is well represented. Thus a broad reflection of the total post-primary sector is evident.

The Teaching and Learning Environment: School Characteristics – General

Additional aspects of the teaching-learning environment considered to be potentially influential factors in examining and interpreting the data were included in the questionnaire. Comparable statistics for the whole-school population were unavailable for these aspects hence they were not analysed with respect to the national population. The aspects examined were the urban or rural background of the student intake and the socio-economic background of the student intake. An analysis of the association between disadvantage and gender was also undertaken to explore any potential relationship between these two factors.

Student numbers represented in the sample

Teachers were asked to state the quantity of students in the school. An approximate number was given. Although the post-primary and primary school numbers in the sample are roughly similar (417 and 399 respectively), the number of pupils represented in the sample differs greatly for both sectors. The post-primary sector sample represents 177,290 students with an average of 470 students per school, whereas the primary sector sample (where small schools are much more common) accounts for only 61,959 students with an average of 161 students per school.

Catchment area – urban or rural

The research sample was explored to determine the urban–rural mix of the school population. This characteristic was considered a potentially influential variable on several outcomes being examined.

The single largest catchment type area was the rural community. This was due to the preponderance of small rural schools at primary level. When the sectors were examined separately the urban-rural mix dominated at post-primary level. This suggested that areas outside the major urban centres were well represented in the sample. It is worth noting, in relation to catchment area type, that while the greatest number of schools was in rural or rural-urban areas, the greatest number of students was in urban areas.

Catchment area – socio-economic

The socio-economic catchment area of the school was considered a potentially influential factor in examining the data on incidence of special educational need. In the questionnaire, teachers were given three options – upper, middle and lower socio-economic categories – and were asked to identify which socio-economic groups were represented in the school's population. No criteria were given to teachers to ascribe the categories. Hence, the resultant figures were teachers' opinions of the socio-economic background of the pupils. The most frequently ascribed category was a mix of middle and lower socio-economic groups (27.5 per cent), closely followed by a mix of all three groups (25.5 per cent). When viewed separately by school level, this trend is maintained for post-primary schools (30 per cent and 27 per cent), but for primary schools, the middle socio-economic group achieves prominence (30 per cent) while two groups, the mid-lower mix and lower socio-economic groups are almost equally represented at 24 per cent.

School gender mix and disadvantage

In relation to gender and disadvantage, the findings from the sample indicated that a higher proportion of mixed schools (26.1 per cent) fell into the 'disadvantaged' category than did single sex schools (17.2 per cent), which on the whole – at post-primary level at least – have been found to be more middle class in pupil composition (Smyth, 1999). When the chi-square statistic was calculated for school gender type on disadvantage status, a statistically significant difference was found between disadvantage and non-

disadvantage status. (χ^2 =6.515; df=2; p< .05). This reflects findings from other research in Ireland which suggests that single-sex schools cater mainly for children from middle-or upper-class backgrounds and that, in general, co-educational schools have a more diverse social class mix than single-sex schools (Smyth, 1999).

As a corollary to the school gender type, the proportion of schools with disadvantage status was examined in relation to the type of post-primary school. The analysis revealed that a significantly higher proportion of VEC schools responding had been accorded disadvantaged status (40.0 per cent) than schools in other sectors (20.0 per cent) (χ^2 =29.280; df=2; p<.001).

The Teaching/Learning Environment: School Characteristics – School Structures for Special Education and Learning Support

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked about the organisation and provision of special education in the school. The areas covered included: the existence of a special class; the number of full-time and part-time teachers engaged in SEN; the existence of a SEN co-ordinator; the existence of a special education team; the frequency of SEN team meetings; the existence of a school policy on SEN; and the existence of a written plan for the organisation of SEN. Teachers were also asked to indicate if they had access to the outside support services of a NEPS psychologist and (primary only) a speech and language therapist. Other related inquiries in this section of the questionnaire requested information on the use of IEPs and the number of IEPs devised that year.

Existence of special classes

Special classes in mainstream national schools were established in the 1950s and increased on foot of the recommendations of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Department of Health, 1965). In 1964, there were 28 special classes in mainstream national schools. This increased to 192 in 1993 and up to 421 in 1999-2000 (DES, 1993; 2000b). Figures from the DES 2005-06 annual report suggest there are now 1,053 special classes in mainstream national schools which is 5 per cent of all mainstream primary classes. Figures for the number of special classes at post-primary level are difficult to access. The SERC report (Department of Education and Science, 1993) states that, at the time of writing, there were 48 special classes in post-primary schools serving up to 600 pupils. Current accurate figures for the number of

schools with special classes are unavailable for either primary or post-primary mainstream sectors to compare with the sample figures detailed in which reports the number of schools indicating they had a special class.

Table 3-1 Special classes in mainstream schools

	Level of	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	_ Totat
Vas sahaal has a special aloss	32	47	79
Yes, school has a special class	8.2%	12.0%	10.1%
No, school does not have a	359	345	704
special class	91.8%	88.0%	89.9%
Total	391	392	783

Note: Missing values are excluded.

A relatively similar proportion of primary and post-primary schools reported having a special class. Given that the median number of students across 15 OECD countries receiving additional resources for disabilities as a percentage of all students in compulsory education is 2.63 per cent (OECD, 2000), the total of 10 per cent of all schools with a special class seems unduly high and care is needed in interpreting this figure. One interpretation is that the figures refer to classes organised at a local level and do not have an official designation of 'special class'. This is akin to schools using a form of streaming. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that special classes typically contain very small numbers of pupils and that the number of pupils in special classes as a proportion of the total number of pupils would likely be much lower. Another interpretation is that schools with special classes are over-represented in the survey bolstered by the strong interest in special needs by respondents from such schools.

Numbers of teachers engaged in teaching students with special educational needs

The 2006 DES figures on teacher allocation for provision to support students with special educational needs in mainstream schools indicated that the primary sector received 5,500 teachers (approximate ratio of 1:83 – one teacher to every 83 students). The corresponding figure for the post-primary sector was 2,300 whole time teacher

equivalents (approximate ratio 1:144 – one teacher for every 144 students) (DES, 2006: 20). Schools have some flexibility in deciding how to distribute their allocation across the student population and the research findings indicate different deployment of resources between the sectors. It can be inferred from the data that the ratio of full-time LS/R posts is approximately 1:84 at primary level and 1:303 at post-primary level. In contrast, the ratio for part-time posts was approximately 1:158 at primary level and 1:98 at post-primary level.³

Thus, we see that more primary schools indicated employing full-time teachers than did post-primary schools. The findings from a 2006 inspectorate survey of post-primary schools referred to 'many schools having "too many" teachers' involved in providing resources hours to students with special educational needs and noted that most resource teaching was delivered by temporary whole time, temporary part-time and teachers on contracts of indefinite duration (O'Conluain, 2007). The results from this research support this contention that large numbers of teachers are associated with teaching students with SEN at post-primary level.

SENCO and SEN teams

Teachers were asked to indicate if there was a person responsible for the co-ordination of SEN in the school. The information gathered is detailed in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2 SEN co-ordinators

	Level of	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	Totat
Yes	353	281	634
168	90.5%	73.0%	81.8%
No	37	104	141
INO	9.5%	27.0%	18.2%
Total	390	385	775
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

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³ In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to state the number of teachers in their schools who were engaged a) in full-time and b) in part-time teaching of students with special educational needs. Despite larger school sizes, only 374 post-primary schools stated that they had *full-time* LS/R teachers (584) on the school staff – in comparison to 390 primary schools with (731) *full-time* LS/R teachers on the staff. In relation to the number of *part-time* LS/R teachers, the figures were reversed. At post-primary level, 1,805 teachers were given part-time hours in teaching students with special needs. This is compared with 391 teachers at primary level.

Overall, 81.8 per cent of schools had a co-ordinator. The existence of a co-ordinator was positively associated with school size and hence the greater number of schools at second level with a co-ordinator. However, a number of very large schools (n=18) did not have a co-ordinator. Similarly, the existence of a co-ordinator was positively associated with the percentage of the student intake identified as having an assessed disability. Only three schools with over 20 per cent of the students with disabilities were without a co-ordinator.

SEN teams

The DES exhorts a whole-school approach to including students with special education needs in mainstream schools (DES, 2000, 2007b). This policy promotes the establishment of a SEN team rather than individual LS/R teachers assuming responsibility for the special needs cohort of the whole-school. In the questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate if there was a SEN team in the school. Overall, 63 per cent of schools reported having one. There was a significant difference, however, between post-primary and primary schools as is evident from Table 3-3.

Table 3-3 SEN teams

	Level of	Level of school		
	Post-primary	Primary	_ Total	
Vac	317	167	484	
Yes	82.1%	44.2%	63.4%	
No	69	211	280	
	17.9%	55.8%	36.6%	
Total	386	378	764	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Note: Missing values are excluded.

The findings indicate that while 82 per cent of post-primary schools stated they had a SEN team, only 44.2 per cent of primary schools indicated likewise. This difference was highly significant when the chi-square was calculated ($\chi^2=116.80$; df=1; p < .001).

SEN teams, school size and disadvantaged status

School size was considered a potential influence on the presence of a school team and the hypothesis that large schools were more likely to have a SEN team was tested. The correlation of school size and SEN team is presented in the distributions in Table 3-4.

Table 3-4 SEN teams and school size

	School Size					Total	
	0–49	50–99	100–199	200–299	300–499	500+	Total
Yes	11	36	57	77	127	142	450
168	21.2%	33.0%	44.9%	74.0%	85.2%	82.1%	63.0%
No	41	73	70	27	22	31	264
NO	78.8%	67.0%	55.1%	26.0%	14.8%	17.9%	37.0%
Total	52	109	127	104	149	173	714
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

The hypothesis was confirmed, the larger schools were significantly more likely to have a SEN team (χ^2 =163.061, df =5, p <.001). The 31 schools with over 500 pupils and without a SEN team are of some concern, however.

The potential relationship between disadvantage status and the presence of a SEN team was analysed to determine if there was relationship between the two factors. Schools with disadvantaged status were significantly more likely (73.1 per cent) to have a SEN team than those without disadvantage status of whom just 61.3 per cent had SEN teams (χ^2 =7.631, df =1, p < .01).

Opportunities for collaboration within SEN team

The DES promotes the establishment of SEN support teams as part of its policy guidelines on SEN/Inclusion (Department of Education & Science, 2007b). To gain insight into the degree of collaborative practices undertaken, teachers were asked to indicate how frequently the SEN team met. For those with a SEN team, the frequency of meetings was explored. It transpired that most respondents (38.5 per cent, n=173) held occasional meetings, with routine weekly meetings cited as the next highest frequency (32.7 per cent, n=147). Relatively few (6.0 per cent; n=27) held daily meetings. There

were differences between primary and post-primary schools in terms of the frequency of meetings where SEN teams existed. In general, post-primary schools were more likely to have SEN team meetings and to meet more frequently with 47.0 per cent (n=135) of relevant post-primary schools meeting on a daily or weekly basis, compared to 23.5 per cent (n=39) of the primary schools with such teams. When the chi-square was calculated for school level on meeting frequency, a statistically significant difference was found between post-primary and primary (χ^2 =52.934; df=3; p<.001).

Existence of school policy and of school plan for SEN

Most schools reported having a school policy on SEN. This figure was far higher for primary (93.1 per cent) than for secondary (78.3 per cent). Over one-fifth of post-primary school respondents (21.7 per cent) reported that their schools did not have a school policy on special educational needs, compared to just 6.9 per cent of primary respondents. Teachers were also asked for information on how SEN was organised in the school. Only half (50.3 per cent) indicated there was a written plan (Table 3-5).

Table 3-5 Basis for organisation of SEN and level of school

	Level of	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	10141
Written plan	152	245	397
written plan	39.4%	60.6%	50.3%
Known procedures	192	109	301
Known procedures	49.7%	27.0%	38.1%
Respond to situation	42	50	92
Respond to situation	10.9%	12.4%	11.6%
Total	386	404	790
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

Again, primary schools were to the forefront of writing plans for the organisation of SEN with 60.6 per cent indicating that a written school plan existed.

Access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to indicate access to a psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Results show most schools have such access (Table 3-6).

Table 3-6 Access to a psychologist

	Level of s	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	
Yes	320	319	639
ies	81.4%	78.6%	80.0%
No	73	87	160
No	18.6%	21.4%	20.0%
Total	393	406	799
10iui	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

There was no significant difference between the post-primary and primary sector -81.4 per cent of post-primary schools and 78.6 per cent of primary schools had access to a psychologist. However, 20 per cent (n=160) of schools in the sample did not. This finding was explored to investigate the factors leading to the lack of a psychological service.

Facets of the school learning environment deemed potentially related to access to NEPS were analysed. These were tested using bi-variate analysis and the chi-square tested for significance. The results of the significance testing of these factors was as follows: location of the school in terms of province proved significant; location in a rural setting versus other setting was not significant; post-primary school type was not significant; gender category of school was not significant; the 'disadvantage' status of the school proved significant. Thus among potential influencing factors only two proved to have a significant association with access to NEPS: provincial location and disadvantaged status. The distributions for access to NEPS by these two variables are set out in Table 3-7 and Table 3-8.

Table 3-7 Access to psychologist and province

	Province					
	Dublin	Leinster (minus Dublin)	Munster	Connacht	Ulster (RoI)	Total
Yes	117	159	104	199	55	634
165	77.5%	81.1%	72.2%	85.0%	82.1%	80.1%
No	34	37	40	35	12	158
NO	22.5%	18.9%	27.8%	15.0%	17.9%	19.9%
Total	151	196	144	234	67	792
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Regarding province, Munster had the least access to NEPS with over a quarter of schools indicating no psychological service. When the chi-square statistic was calculated for province on NEPS access, a statistically significant difference was found (χ^2 =10.116; df=4; p<.05). When disadvantage status was considered, it emerged that 89 per cent of schools with disadvantage status had access to NEPS compared with 77.4 per cent of schools without disadvantaged status. This difference proved significant when the chi-square was calculated (χ^2 =11.127;df=1;p<.01).

Table 3-8 Access to NEPS, by disadvantaged status of the school

	Disadvanta	Total	
	Yes	No	10141
Yes	162	458	620
Tes	89.0%	77.4%	80.1%
No	20	134	154
INO	11.0%	22.6%	19.9%
Total	182	592	774
Τοιαι	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

Access to speech and language specialist

In the primary school questionnaire, teachers were asked to indicate their access to a speech and language specialist. Less than half the primary schools (45.6 per cent) had access to a speech and language specialist. This finding was explored further to determine if any subdivision of the primary school sector had inferior or superior access. For the school characteristics explored – disadvantage, province and gender – no significant difference emerged to suggest differential access to speech and language specialists. All schools irrespective of location or type had equally poor access to speech and language specialists.

Individual education plans (IEPs) developed

Although the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) was not implemented in full at the time of writing and the devising of IEPs not mandatory, a number of schools had begun to provide IEPs for students with special needs. The prevalence of devising IEPs was explored and the results (Table 3-9) reveal a significant difference (χ^2 =162.129; df=1; p<.001) between post-primary and primary schools. Although 96.6 per cent of primary schools had devised IEPs only 59.1 per cent of post-primary schools provided them.

Table 3-9 Schools engaged in devising IEPs

	Level of	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	Total
Yes	227	395	622
Tes	59.1%	96.6%	78.4%
No	157	14	171
NO	40.9%	3.4%	21.6%
Total	384	409	793
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

Teachers were also asked to state the actual numbers of IEPs devised during the school year of the survey. The results in Table 3-10 indicate that over 10,000 IEPs were devised during the year. When examined in detail, this information revealed that large numbers of IEPs were devised by a small number of schools – giving rise to an artificially high average; therefore the mode and median are presented for each sector to portray a fuller picture of schools experience in developing IEPs.

Table 3-10 Number of IEPs developed

	Teachers responding	IEPS devised
	yes	
Post-primary	206	3,573 (10=mode; 12=median; mean 17)
Primary	350	6,591 (20=mode; 13=median; mean 19)
Total	584	10,164

Note: Missing values are excluded

The figures show that although the primary schools in the survey had, on average, a much smaller pupil cohort, they developed almost twice as many IEPs as post-primary schools. The mode is presented as it provides evidence that a number of primary schools were extremely active in devising IEPs.

Student Characteristics

The second aspect of the teaching-learning environment on which data were gathered through the questionnaire, was information on the student population. This included details about the number of students in the school, the number with assessed disabilities, the number receiving support, and the percentage of the student population with literacy and numeracy difficulties. This information was compared for differences between the post-primary and primary sector. These aspects were then analysed with school variables, such as geographical distribution, gender, disadvantage status and school type, to determine any interrelationship between the variables. In commenting on this aspect of the research, it is acknowledged that the philosophical and statistical basis for classifying and categorising children are the subject of much debate (Florian *et al*, 2006; McLaughlin *et al*, 2006; Terzi, 2005), though the intent, to ensure access to services, is meritworthy (See Chapter 1 for further discussion).

Students with assessed disabilities

LS/R teachers were asked to state the number of pupils in the school with an assessed disability. The information given was based on teacher perception of the number of students who had been assessed. The questionnaire for LS/R teachers was addressed to the teacher with main responsibilities for special educational needs, as it was expected this person would be the most familiar with the figures on disability and special educational needs in the school. While the question specified that only those with assessed disabilities be included, it was not possible to verify this data nor was there independent, comparable data to assess it for representativeness. At present, there is no national register of students with disabilities. The information on the numbers of students with disabilities contained in the recent audit of school enrolment policies (DES, 2007a) was considered for comparative purposes but found to be insufficiently robust to warrant its use.

Number of students with an assessed disability

According to data obtained through the questionnaire, in the research sample, the percentage of pupils with assessed disabilities varied from 5.26 per cent (n=9,333) among the post-primary pupil population to 3.28 per cent (n=2,035) among primary-level pupils. This provided a broad depiction of the current teaching-learning environment as perceived by teachers in the research sample.

Teachers' perceptions of the percentage of students with an assessed disability at post-primary level was higher in comparison with primary level. The difficulty of accurately calculating the number of students with assessed disability at post-primary level is problematic, as attested to by other surveys (ACCS, 2007; Department of Education & Science, 2007a). Three factors may influence the higher number of students with assessed disability at post-primary level. First, following the introduction of the general allocation system at primary level there may be less pressure to have primary students assessed – whereas at second level, students must have an assessment to officially access additional intensive support. Furthermore, at post-primary level, having an assessed disability may be useful in being granted reasonable accommodations in state certificate exams (RACE) and many parents may opt to have students privately assessed

(ACCS, 2008; NAPD, 2007), thus increasing the number of students with an assessed disability. In 2006, a total of 12,146 reasonable accommodations were granted by the State Exam Commission for the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied Exams. While it is unwise to assume that every student who is granted RACE has an assessed disability, or that all students with an assessed disability are entitled to RACE, and also noting that some students may avail of more than one type of RACE, this figure serves to contextualise the research findings of the numbers of students with assessed disabilities at post-primary level. Taking into consideration that 12,146 reasonable accommodations were granted to the two exam year-groups (approximately one reasonable accommodation for every nine students sitting an exam), post-primary teachers' perceptions that 5.26 per cent of the school population have an assessed disability no longer seems unreasonable but is, perhaps, a misunderstanding of the precise interpretation of 'assessed disability'.

As regards factors which might potentially affect the proportion of school populations with assessed disabilities, there was no significant difference between primary and post-primary schools in their responses to the question on the proportion of students with assessed disability as a percentage of their own school population. Further analysis conducted on a regional/provincial basis revealed no significant difference between schools in the different provinces in terms of the percentage reported by LS/R teachers of their own school population assessed as having a disability. The data were also analysed regarding the gender mix of schools where data on the two variables were available. Here, each division of school type indicated a similar dispersal of students with assessed disabilities – most schools irrespective of whether they were male, female or co-educational had less than 10 per cent of the student intake identified as having an assessed disability.

Second, a variable significantly related to the proportion of pupils with assessed disabilities in different types of school was that of disadvantaged versus non-disadvantaged status. The schools in the research sample with disadvantaged status consistently reported having a higher percentage of their student intake identified as having disabilities. A total of 45.2 per cent of schools with disadvantage status indicated that more than 10 per cent of their school population had an assessed disability compared with just 15.2 per cent of schools without disadvantage status. The

differences were significant and this finding was supported by the chi-square calculation (χ^2 =44.060; df=2; p<.001).

Third, a further variable significantly related to the proportion of students identified as having assessed disabilities at post-primary level was school type, that is whether secondary, vocational or community/comprehensive. Where schools identified a cohort of students with assessed disabilities, the percentage of the student population with disabilities was highest in the vocational sector. A total of 52.4 per cent of VEC schools indicated that more than 10 per cent of their students had an assessed disability. Neither the secondary (14.4 per cent) nor community and comprehensive schools (33.3 per cent) had such a large proportion of their students with assessed disabilities. Most schools in both these sectors had less than 10 per cent of their school populations with assessed disabilities. The difference between school types was significant (χ^2 =33.161; df=2; p<.001). The evidence from this analysis supports the contention that VEC schools have a higher proportion of students with assessed disabilities.

Students in receipt of LS/R

LS/R teachers were asked to give the number of students in receipt of learning/resource support within their schools (see

Table 3-11). The data were then examined to determine if statistically significant relationships were observable.

Table 3-11 Percentage of students in receipt of support

	LS/R teachers reporting figures	Pupils receiving LS/R support as % of reported pupil populations in the teachers' schools
Post-primary	351	9.7%
Primary	336	17.3%
Total	687	11.6%

As school size varied significantly, the number of students receiving learning/resource support was calculated as a percentage of the school population, enabling comparisons between the sectors. At primary level, higher proportions of students received support than at post-primary level (Table 3-12).

Table 3-12 Percentage of students in receipt of LS/R support

	Level of	Level of school		
	Post-primary	Primary	Total	
II. J 100/	162	11	173	
Under 10%	49.2%	3.6%	27.1%	
100/ 100/	123	151	274	
10%–19%	37.4%	48.9%	42.9%	
200/ 200/	22	101	123	
20%–29%	6.7%	32.7%	19.3%	
200/ 200/	11	29	40	
30%-39%	3.3%	9.4%	6.3%	
400/	11	17	28	
40%+	3.3%	5.5%	4.4%	
Total	329	309	638	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Factors affecting numbers receiving LS/R support

The data on the percentage of school intake receiving additional support was analysed in relation to a number of variables: disadvantaged school status; school type; the gender composition of the school. Results indicate a highly significant relationship between support and disadvantage (χ^2 =44.32; df=1; p< .001). Schools with disadvantaged status were found to have significantly higher proportions of students getting additional LS/R support. Over one-fifth of schools with disadvantaged status had more than 30 per cent of students receiving additional support in comparison to less than one-sixteenth of schools without disadvantage status. The findings showed a disproportionate percentage of students in schools with disadvantaged status in need of additional support.

The percentage of students getting support was explored in relation to school type at primary and post-primary levels. Some differences showed across the categories. They could not be tested for significance, however, because the minimum expected cell frequency was violated. The differences in percentage of students getting learning support were most striking at post-primary level. Greater proportions of the student population were identified as receiving support in VEC schools than in any other school type. Here it was clear that one-sixth of VEC schools stated that over 30 per cent of

their students had learning support or resource. This figure highlighted the greater likelihood of VEC schools than other school types to have disadvantaged status, as well as high numbers of pupils in need of LS/R support.

Although some difference emerged between the gender composition of the school and the percentage of pupils having an assessed disability, far greater differences were observed when the percentage of students receiving LS/R support was examined. There was a clear difference between single-sex girls' schools and the boys-only and mixed schools. For example, 12.4 per cent of mixed schools reported more than 30 per cent of their pupils received LS/R; 9.6 per cent of boys' schools reported more than 30 per cent but just 3.5 per cent of girls-only schools reported more than 30 per cent of pupils receiving LS/R support. This suggests that either boys have more reason to require learning support or are more likely to be selected for learning support. There is some evidence internationally to suggest that support needs among females are underdiagnosed as girls are less likely to cause disruption in class and thus draw attention to their difficulties (Arms, Bickett & Graff, 2008).

Teacher Characteristics

A portrayal of the teachers engaged in the education of students requiring additional support forms the fourth and final component of the description of the teaching-learning environment. A factor that must be taken into consideration with this aspect of the research is that the choice of respondent is outside one's control in postal survey research (Cohen *et al*, 2007). This forms a background to the findings of this section. It must be continually borne in mind that each post-primary school has an average of seven teachers engaged in the support of children with additional educational needs and that each primary school has an average of three teachers. The questionnaire was addressed to the LS/R/SEN teacher/co-ordinator and, therefore, it is probable that the most senior and experienced teacher took on the task of answering the questionnaire. Thus, the description of teacher characteristics depicted here refers only to a portion of the teachers engaged in the field of SEN.

The five main areas on which data were gathered related to teacher identity as a learning support or resource teacher; teacher gender; teacher experience; and teacher choice in entering the field of special education. The data pertaining to each of these five areas are

initially presented in relation to the level of school. This is followed by the results of a series of cross-tabulations conducted on three potentially influential variables – province, disadvantage and school type.

Teacher identity

Teachers were asked to identify themselves either as a learning support teacher or as a resource teacher (Table 3-13).

Table 3-13 Teacher identity as learning support or resource teacher

	Level	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	Totat
Learning support teacher	198	226	424
Learning support teacher	52.7%	57.2%	55.0%
Resource/special educational	152	140	292
needs teacher	40.4%	35.4%	37.9%
Both	24	29	53
Botti	6.4%	7.3%	6.9%
Other	2	0	2
Other	.5%	.0%	.3%
Total	376	395	771
10141	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

A little over half of the respondents (55 per cent) stated their primary identification was as a learning support teacher. The results were broadly similar for post-primary and primary schools with few (6.9 per cent) indicating that they perceived themselves as having the dual designation.

Teacher gender

The analysis of the data indicated that the overall percentage of female LS/R teacher respondents was 86.2 per cent (Table 3-14).

Table 3-14 Teachers level of school and gender

	Level of	Total		
	Post-primary	Primary	_ Totat	
Female	329	345	674	
remaie	86.1%	86.0%	86.1%	
Male	52	56	108	
Wiale	13.6%	14.0%	13.8%	
Total	382	401	783	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

The proportion of male and female respondents in the area of SEN was similar in both sectors. For the primary sector, it closely mirrored the proportion of male and female teachers in the sector as a whole (Drudy, 2008a). The female proportion in the case of the post-primary LS/R teachers was a good deal higher than is the case for the second-level teaching population as a whole, where the proportion of male teachers is still just over 40 per cent (ibid).

Teachers' experience

A concern in the field of special education is the possibility that significantly fewer experienced teachers work with students who have the greatest needs. In the main, and unsurprisingly given the method of questionnaire distribution, the respondents were very experienced teachers with an average of 19.16 years in the post-primary sector and 20.34 years in the primary sector. This analysis of teacher experience is reported in Table 3-15.

Table 3-15 Respondents' years of experience

	Level of s	Total		
	Post-primary	Primary	_ Total	
Less than 3	12	17	29	
years	3.2%	4.5%	3.9%	
4 5 years	17	27	44	
4–5 years	4.6%	7.1%	5.8%	
6–10 years	65	53	118	
0-10 years	17.4%	13.9%	15.7%	
11–20 years	119	92	211	
11–20 years	31.9%	24.2%	28.0%	
21 - voors	160	191	351	
21+ years	42.9%	50.3%	46.6%	
Total	373	380	753	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

This analysis revealed that over half of the primary teacher respondents had over 20 years' experience, whereas the proportion dropped to 42.9 per cent of post-primary teachers. However, the proviso, stated at the outset of this section, must again be reiterated, that the teacher characteristics described here are only indicative of the research sample and not of the whole SEN teaching population.

Years of experience in SEN

A further question requested information on the number of years teachers had been involved in teaching in the area of SEN. Figures here were markedly different to those for general teaching experience. Overall, the average for SEN teaching experience was 8.2 years. This breaks down into 10.5 years for post-primary teachers and 6.03 for primary teachers. Additional analysis provided further detail. Again, it might have been expected that, because of the methodology used, respondents would be, to a greater degree than average, the most experienced in special educational needs (see Table 3-16).

Table 3-16 Years' experience in SEN

	Level of	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	
less than 3 years	46	139	185
less than 3 years	12.7%	35.5%	24.5%
1 5 years	70	86	156
4–5 years	19.3%	22.0%	20.7%
6 10 years	144	122	266
6–10 years	39.7%	31.2%	35.3%
11–20 years	67	33	100
11–20 years	18.5%	8.4%	13.3%
21 voors	36	11	47
21+ years	9.9%	2.8%	6.2%
Total	363	391	754
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

However, it can be seen that, at primary level, 35.5 per cent of respondent teachers had less than three years' SEN experience. This may reflect the fact that the numbers of posts sanctioned for SEN has increased significantly in recent years.

Additional analysis

Years teaching experience and years SEN experience were cross-tabulated with several variables to determine any significant relationships. One hypothesis was that teachers working with students with SEN in schools with disadvantage status would have less experience than teachers in school without disadvantage status. Data did not support this hypothesis. The result from the cross-tabulation of disadvantage and experience was that, for SEN staff in the sample, similar proportions of teachers with little experience work in disadvantaged (3 per cent) and schools without disadvantaged status (4.3 per cent). In contrast, a greater proportion of SEN staff in disadvantaged schools (52.1 per cent) was likely to have had extensive teaching experience when compared to staff in schools without disadvantaged status (45.5 per cent). Although the difference was not statistically significant (χ^2 =3.866; df=4; p=.425), the results show that proportionally more experienced teachers working in SEN are in disadvantaged schools. A similar

result, but even more magnified, was found for teachers' years of SEN experience in disadvantaged schools and schools without disadvantaged status.

The result from the cross-tabulation of disadvantage and SEN experience was that similar proportions of teachers with little SEN experience worked in disadvantaged schools (21.4 per cent) and schools without disadvantaged status (24.8 per cent). In contrast, greater proportions of SEN staff in disadvantaged schools (10.7 per cent) were likely to have extensive SEN experience when compared to staff in schools without disadvantaged status (5.1 per cent). Although the difference was not statistically significant (χ^2 =8.398; df=4; p=.078), the finding that proportionally more experienced LS/R teachers work in disadvantaged schools is noteworthy.

The relationships between school type and teachers' general experience and SEN experience were explored for the post-primary sector. Regarding the general teaching experience of teachers working in SEN, the three school types had remarkably similar profiles. In all three, the proportions of respondents with over 21 years' teaching experience were the biggest categories. As the expected frequency cell count was violated, significance was not calculated. Results for the cross-tabulation of SEN experience and school were more ambiguous. Within the research sample, some differences emerged between the SEN experience of teachers in the three post-primary school types. Secondary teachers were least likely to have extensive SEN experience; community/comprehensive and VEC schools had equivalent proportions of SEN teachers with over 11 years' experience. Although the results were not significant $(\chi^2=14.567; df=8; p=.068)$, they provide interesting data on post-primary teachers' SEN experience.

SEN as an area of choice

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they had chosen to work in special education or had no option. The findings in Table 3-17 suggest that, overall, most (77 per cent) had chosen to work in the field, but at primary level a sizeable proportion (27 per cent) had no choice.

Table 3-17 Choice to work in area of SEN

	Level of	Total	
	Post-primary	Primary	
Choose to work in area	306	278	584
Choose to work in area	81.2%	73.0%	77.0%
Did not choose to work in	71	103	174
area	18.8%	27.0%	23.0%
Total	377	381	758
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Choice was cross-tabulated with other factors that were possible reasons for lack of choice. One hypothesis was that geographical location might be associated with choice, as school management in rural areas might be more constrained in availability of qualified/interested staff than that in urban areas. The data did not support this. Choice was found to have no significant relationship with geographical location. The data were examined to determine if province or rural area was associated with teachers' choosing or not choosing to work in SEN but no evidence was found to suggest that it was. The proportion of teachers choosing to work in special education and having no choice in working in special education was evenly distributed throughout the four provinces and Dublin city/county.

Role choice and teaching experience

When role choice was explored in association with two experience-related variables – the number of years' teaching experience and the number of years' SEN teaching experience – very strong positive relationships were established. It transpired that those with fewer than three years' teaching experience were less likely to have chosen to work in SEN than teachers with a number of years teaching experience.

Table 3-18 details the increasing percentage of teachers stating they had chosen to work in special education as their teaching experience grew. The differences in proportions was significant (χ^2 =29.897; df=4; p<.001).

Table 3-18 Role choice and respondents' years of teaching experience

	Years of Teaching Experience				Total	
	less than 3	4–5	6–10	11–20	21+	Totat
Chose to work	11	29	82	168	279	569
in area	40.7%	67.4%	70.7%	81.2%	80.9%	77.1%
Did not choose	16	14	34	39	66	169
to work in area	59.3%	32.6%	29.3%	18.8%	19.1%	22.9%
Total	27	43	116	207	345	738
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When teachers' SEN teaching experience was analysed in relation to role choice the difference was also significant. Here, again, there was a strongly positive relationship between the increasing percentage of teachers who had chosen to work in SEN and the number of years working with students with special educational needs (Table 3-19). When the incidence of teachers' role choice and years of experience were tabulated and the chi-square statistic calculated, a highly significantly relationship between the two emerged (χ^2 =38.09; df=4; p<.001).

Table 3-19 Role choice and respondents' SEN experience

	Years Teaching SEN				Total	
	less than 3	4–5	6–10	11–20	21+	Тош
Choose to work	108	123	216	83	43	573
in area	61.0%	79.9%	82.1%	83.0%	91.5%	77.3%
Did not choose	69	31	47	17	4	168
to work in area	39.0%	20.1%	17.9%	17.0%	8.5%	22.7%
Takal	177	154	263	100	47	741
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

3.2.3 Summary – school context: Teaching and learning environment,

students and teachers

This section summarises the key issues emerging from the research which describe the school context in Ireland regarding special education. Due to a lacuna in some official statistics, it was not always possible to compare the sample with Department of Education figures (see section for details).

Findings: Details of School Dataset

Questionnaires were sent to all post-primary schools and to a sample of primary schools in Ireland. Responses from 417 primary and 399 post-primary LS/R teachers, and from 196 primary school principals and 212 post-primary principals, yielded information on 816 schools – a sufficient return to permit statistical generalisation to the whole population (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Responses had details on schools, teaching and learning environments, students with resource and learning support needs, numbers of support teachers, and LS/R teachers' professional experience and professional development requirements.

Schools responded from every county in the Republic of Ireland. The school characteristics of the sample broadly corresponded to that of national population with similar proportions of school type, size, urban/rural location and disadvantage status. Participating schools between them represented almost a quarter of a million pupils with primary pupils approximating 61,959 and post-primary pupils 177,290.

Findings: The School Context – Teaching and Learning Environment

Special classes

Some 10 per cent of respondents reported special classes in their schools, 12 per cent at primary and 8 per cent at post-primary. This is far greater than the figure interpolated from the DES 2005-06 annual report which suggests 5 per cent of primary pupils are in special classes in mainstream primary schools but no comparable figures are available for scrutiny at second level. Both these figures warrant further research as it suggests

'special classes' are organised informally on a local basis and cause concern on the implementation of a policy of inclusion.

Number of LS/R teachers, SENCOs, SEN teams, access to NEPS

Some 94 per cent of primary, and an equal percentage of post-primary, respondents reported at least one full-time LS/R teacher. Primary teachers indicated higher numbers. Just 73 per cent of the primary, but 91 per cent of the post-primary, teachers reported having a SENCO on the staff. A low proportion of primary respondents (44 per cent) indicated the existence of a SEN team in the school, but the proportion reporting such a team at post-primary level was almost double at 82 per cent. Larger schools and disadvantaged schools were significantly more likely to have a SEN team. Schools with high percentages of pupils getting LS/R support were more likely to have SEN teams but variations and gaps in this category were evident – even where high percentages of students with LS/R needs were reported. In general, post-primary schools were more likely to have SEN meetings and to meet more frequently.

Some 80 per cent of schools indicated they had access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), though regional variations emerged with Munster and Dublin city/county reporting the lowest levels of access. Disadvantaged schools in general were significantly more likely to have access to NEPS. In primary schools, access to speech and language specialists was poor at 44 per cent of the total.

SEN policy, SEN plans, IEPs

A total of 86 per cent of schools reported having a policy on special educational needs although over a fifth of primary schools did not. Just half of the schools (fewer at post-primary level) reported having a written plan for the organisation of special educational needs in their schools. Over three-quarters of the schools (78 per cent) indicated they devised individual education plans (IEPs), with a significantly higher percentage of primary respondents (97 per cent) compared to post-primary (59 per cent) reporting such activities. Evidence showed some individual schools were extremely active in devising high numbers of IEPs for pupils.

Student characteristics

On student characteristics, the percentage of students with assessed disabilities in the schools, as reported by LS/R teachers, were 3-5 per cent, with higher proportions reported in post-primary schools. Respondents indicated higher proportions in disadvantaged schools, with vocational schools at post-primary level having the highest proportions. Primary schools in general had higher proportions receiving learning and resource support. Again, disadvantaged schools, and vocational schools at post-primary level, reported higher percentages of pupils in the LS/R support category. The gender category was significant here with fewer girls' schools, and proportionately more boys' and mixed schools reporting high proportions of students receiving LS/R support.

Teacher characteristics

When referring to teachers' own characteristics and identities, respondents were referring to themselves. Over half (55 per cent) of the responding teachers identified themselves as learning support teachers and 38 per cent identified themselves as resource or special educational needs (SEN) teachers. Just 7 per cent identified themselves as having the dual designation. Most respondents (86 per cent) were female. Three-quarters (75 per cent) had more than 10 years' teaching experience. However, four-fifths (81 per cent) had 10 years' or less experience with special educational needs, with close to half (44 per cent) having five years' or less SEN experience. Teachers in disadvantaged schools were slightly more likely to have longer periods of work with special educational needs. Most teachers (77 per cent) had volunteered to work with special educational needs, with a slightly higher proportion at post-primary level. A substantial proportion (23 per cent) of teachers had not chosen to go into this field but had been allocated to the role by school management. The more experienced teachers were in teaching and SEN the more likely they were to have chosen this area and the less likely to have felt constrained to work there due to management allocation.

Synopsis of Findings

Data on the context of the respondents' schools provide an important backdrop to the findings on perceived roles and responsibilities of the learning support/resource positions of respondents, and on their stated professional development requirements.

The picture that emerges is one of variation in school approaches to the education of pupils with disabilities/SEN/learning support needs.

- Many schools had special classes arranged on an informal, local basis.
- All schools had at least one LS/R teacher and many had multiple persons working in that role on either a full-time or part-time basis particularly at post-primary level.
- Most respondents had chosen to work in SEN. At primary level, however, a significant proportion of mainly inexperienced teachers had had no choice.
- While many schools showed evidence of teamwork, particularly the larger ones, many have no team approach to inclusion suggesting responsibility for student educational outcomes falls on individual LS/R teachers rather than the whole staff.
- ♦ More students with assessed disabilities were reported at post-primary than at primary level and a possible under-diagnosis of girls at both levels.
- The greatest challenges in terms of the number of pupils with assessed disabilities and learning support needs are found in disadvantaged schools at primary and post-primary levels.
- ♦ Challenges in terms of the number of pupils with assessed disabilities and learning support needs are mainly found in vocational schools in the post-primary sector.
- ♦ Most schools had a policy on SEN.
- A high proportion of schools lacked a written plan.
- Virtually all primary schools devise IEPs for students whereas one-third of postprimary schools do not.
- Only 80 per cent of schools reported having access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

Implications of Findings

The results from the research on the school context for inclusive education in Ireland highlight nine areas which would benefit from greater transparency. The findings indicate a need for:

- Streamlining procedures used for establishment of, entry into and reporting of numbers in special classes.
- Streamlining procedures used for categorisation and reporting of numbers of students as having assessed disabilities and special educational needs with particular attention paid to under achieving females.
- Streamlining procedures and reporting of numbers of students availing of reasonable accommodations in certificate exams.
- ♦ Streamlining procedures for allocating resources hours within schools and reporting numbers of teachers engaged in special education.
- ♦ Incentives/stronger recommendations for distribution of resource hours fewer teachers with more hours at post-primary level and option given to teachers to experienced teachers to work in the area at primary level.
- Incentives/stronger recommendations regarding shared responsibility for educational outcomes of students with special educational needs among schools.⁴
- ♦ Incentives/stronger recommendations regarding shared responsibility for educational outcomes of students with special educational needs within schools.
- ♦ Incentives/stronger recommendations on the need for written policies and plans for organisation of special educational needs within schools.
- Incentives/stronger recommendations regarding individual education plannedprogrammes for students at second level pending implementation of IEPs in line with the EPSEN Act.

Research data provide a detailed description of existing education provision and practice in Ireland. The breadth and depth of the findings illustrate that the research

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⁴ Suggestions could include setting quota systems for all levels of ability, ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds in schools particularly at post-primary level to ensure more heterogeneous school populations and setting quota systems for high status university courses with reserved places for students from diverse backgrounds.

sample typifies in many respects the totality of the primary and post-primary school sector in Ireland and so give a reliable portrayal of the current situation in the two sectors. The information indicates that the professional development needs of LS/R teachers arise within varying contexts at school level. It is with these factors in mind that the findings on roles and responsibilities, and on LS/R teachers' professional development requirements, must be interpreted.

3.3 LS/R Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

Overview

This section examines the tasks that LS/R teachers currently undertake as part of their role and the task emphasis they would adopt in an ideal situation. Principals were also asked for their views. The findings indicate that the move to more inclusive education in Ireland necessitates a major shift in the culture and thinking of schools where collaboration and teamwork replace isolation and autonomy as the dominant school culture. This 'unsettling' of traditional roles will require considerable leadership and support from principals and the Department of Education and Science.

3.3.1 Introduction

In addition to teaching, teachers working with pupils who have special educational needs undertake a variety of tasks as part of their role (Szwed, 2007a; Cole, 2005; Robertson, 2005; Forlin, 2001). As a preliminary to exploring teachers' professional development requirements, information was sought on the range of functions performed by LS/R teachers in Ireland as part of this research project.

The postal questionnaire was the main source for collating data on the major tasks and functions of LS/R teachers. The qualitative data pertaining to this area arising from the interviews and group discussions is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The questionnaire elements eliciting information relating to aspects of the roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers consisted of 32 possible tasks that teachers rated on a scale of 1 to 5. This task list was generated over several years in discussions with teachers on the work they undertake as LS/R teachers. They were asked to rate the tasks in two ways: a) how important the tasks were in their current workload; and b) how important they believed the tasks should be in an ideal situation. This question was also included in the

principals' questionnaire. Thus, several possible comparisons are offered through data analyses: the contrasts between the primary and post-primary teachers' perceptions of their role; the contrast between teachers' current role and their ideal role; the contrast between perceptions of the teachers and principals; and the contrasts between the two sectors as a whole.

3.3.2 Range of tasks

Teachers indicated that a large number of tasks contributed to their workload. Of a total of 32 tasks, 22 were rated by most as important and only six tasks were rated unimportant. Unsolicited comments appended to the returned questionnaires revealed that teachers found the task list very helpful in enumerating their work commitments.

The main areas identified by primary and post-primary teachers as core components of the LS/R role were teaching students in small group or individual settings and identifying students with special educational needs (Table 3-20 and 3-21). At primary level, developing and implementing IEPs and record keeping were deemed other important aspects of the role while at post-primary level, applying for exam concessions, timetabling and liaison with the principal and parents featured as key tasks. The least important aspects of teachers' current roles in both sectors were liaising with the Department of Education, SEN inspector, providing substitute cover for colleagues, staff development in special educational needs, team teaching and co-ordinating SNAs

In the pilot stage of the research, it emerged that teachers were dissatisfied with their workload and wanted to change the relative proportions of time allocated to various tasks. A question was incorporated into the questionnaire eliciting information on the 'ideal' role teachers envisaged. Responses to this contribute to identifying areas for future professional development. An important aspect of professional development is not only ensuring that teachers are prepared for their current role but also that they are prepared for future developments of that role.

When asked to identify which areas they considered important in an 'ideal' context, primary and post-primary teachers indicated a preference to spend more time collaborating with colleagues. In the interviews, this area was explored further and it emerged that 'time' was considered a main deterrent to implementing the ideal role. The

other major factor in preventing more collaboration with other teachers was the lack of skills in this area. Teachers were uncomfortable with the idea of promoting collaboration as they felt they lacked collaboration skills and the ability to persuade other teachers, particularly their more experienced colleagues. It may be that this skill in co-opting other teachers to change established practice is one which appropriately belongs to a middle-management function and not to less experienced teachers with less status in the staffroom.

Difference emerged between responses of primary and post-primary teachers in the perception of their roles and responsibilities. For example, the former did not rate as important applying for reasonable accommodations in exams. This is because accommodations are not officially part of assessments carried out in primary school. It would be interesting to explore this further and determine what accommodations, if any, are offered to primary pupils. Since the minister has recommended specific assessments for these pupils, the accommodations available to those with disabilities/SEN is worthy of further research.

Additional roles emerged during interviews. For example, one teacher recounted how she, her husband and their children spent summer evenings laying flooring for the classroom – the fundraising effort had only stretched to the purchase of the materials. Another spoke of constructing shelves for books as those commercially available were too expensive for the budget allocated to special education.

3.3.3 Roles and responsibilities – current and Ideal

Table 3-20 and Table 3-21 below illustrate the patterns observable for primary and postprimary teachers and principals when their ratings of the most important roles and responsibilities in the current and ideal situations were analysed and their 'top ten' nominations presented.

Table 3-20 Primary teachers: Top ten most important roles and responsibilities (current and ideal)

	Primary teachers:	Primary teachers:
	Roles/responsibilities	Roles/responsibilities
	- Current Top 10	- Ideal Top 10
1	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction	Identification of students with SEN
2	Withdrawal of students for individual instruction	Collaborating with other teachers
3	Identification of students with SEN	Monitoring student progress
4	Admin of screening/diagnostic tests	Admin of screening/diagnostic tests
5	Monitoring of student progress	Reassessing student progress
6	Implementing IEPs	Implementing of IEPs
7	Record-keeping	Reviewing IEPs
8	Reassessing student progress	Formulating IEPs
9	Formulating IEPs	Liaising with parents
10	Preparing resource and subject materials for individualised teaching	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction

Table 3-21 Post-primary teachers top ten most important roles and responsibilities (current and ideal)

	Post-primary teachers:	Post-primary teachers:		
	Roles/responsibilities	Roles/responsibilities		
	- Current Top 10	- Ideal Top 10		
1	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction	Collaborating with other teachers		
2	Identification of students with SEN	Identification of students with SEN		
3	Application for exam concessions	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction		
4	Withdrawal of students for individual instruction	Monitoring of student progress		
5	Admin of screening/diagnostic tests	Implementation of IEPs		
6	Timetabling of additional support	Liaising with parents		
7	Record-keeping	Liaising with principal on SEN issues		
8	Liaising with principal on SEN issues	Liaising with psychological services		
9	Monitoring of student progress	Reviewing IEPs		
10	Liaising with parents	Admin of screening/diagnostic tests		

The analysis of the teachers' responses indicated that the most marked changes in the importance attached to the LS/R teacher roles and responsibilities when moving from the current to the ideal situation for primary teachers was that withdrawal of pupils for individual and group instruction, record-keeping and preparing materials were 'demoted'. Collaborating with other teachers, identification of students with special educational needs, and monitoring and reassessing student progress increased in importance. For post-primary teachers timetabling, record-keeping and applying for subject exemptions decreased in importance. On the other hand, factors that, in an ideal situation, post-primary teachers felt would be of higher importance were collaborating with other teachers, monitoring of student progress and liaison with parents.

For primary principals, the aspects of a teacher's role which decreased in importance in an ideal situation were withdrawal for small group and individual instruction, record-keeping and liaison with the principal. Aspects perceived as increasing in importance were collaborating with other teachers, identifying students with SEN, implementing IEPs and reassessing student progress. At the post-primary level, somewhat similar findings pertained. In an ideal situation, post-primary principals saw as less important: withdrawal for small group and individual instruction, applying for examination concessions and liaising with the principal. They attached increased importance to collaborating with other teachers, monitoring student progress and record-keeping (Table 3-22 and Table 3-23).

Table 3-22 Primary principals: Top ten most important roles and responsibilities (current and ideal)

	Primary principals:	Primary principals:
	Roles/responsibilities	Roles/responsibilities
	- Current Top 10	- Ideal Top 10
1	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction	Identifying students with SEN
2	Record-keeping	Collaborating with other teachers
3	Identifying students with SEN	Monitoring student progress
4	Withdrawal of students for individual instruction	Implementing IEPs
5	Monitoring student progress	Reassessing student progress
6	Screening/diagnostic tests	Screening/diagnostic tests
7	Liaising with principal	Formulating IEPs
8	Implementing IEPs	Record-keeping
9	Collaborating with other teachers	Liaising with parents
10	Reassessing student progress	Reviewing IEPs

Table 3-23 Post-primary principals: Top ten most important roles and responsibilities (current and ideal)

	Post-primary principals:	Post-primary principals:
	Roles/responsibilities	Roles/responsibilities
	- Current Top 10	- Ideal Top 10
1	Identifying students with SEN	Collaborating with other teachers
2	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction	Identifying students with SEN
3	Applying for exam concessions	Monitoring student progress
4	Liaising with parents	Liaising with parents
5	Screening/diagnostic tests	Screening/diagnostic tests
6	Liaising with principal	Reassessing student progress
7	Liaising with psychological services	Liaising with psychological services
8	Withdrawal of students for individual instruction	Record-keeping
9	Monitoring student progress	Reviewing IEPs
10	Record-keeping	Liaising with principal

3.3.4 Roles and responsibilities in special educational needs: analysis of scaled data

After considering respondents' ratings on the importance attached to current and ideal roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers, it was decided to explore the development of scales to identify additional underlying aggregate patterns in the data and to test for statistical significance. Since the data were at ordinal rather than interval or ratio level, parametric testing was considered inappropriate (Cohen *et al*, 2007: 570). Therefore, scale construction was conducted using non-parametric methods.

A total of six scales in all were identified from the 32 items listed under each of current and ideal roles and responsibilities. The components of each scale were derived from the question on roles and responsibilities of main LS/R teacher/co-ordinators in the school – currently and ideally (see Appendix 5, Question 2.7 for details). Each scale was tested for reliability using an alpha coefficient of reliability, Cronbach's alpha (Cohen *et al*, 2007: 148, 506; Pallant, 2005: 91). The scales with their composite items and reliability levels are presented below (reliability levels are as suggested by Cohen *et al*, 2007: 148).

<u>Scale 1</u>: Individual student focused scale (*current*) – items: withdrawal of students for individual instruction; preparing resource and subject materials for differentiated inclass teaching; preparing resource and subject materials for individualised instruction; identification of students with SEN; administration of screening/diagnostic tests; formulation of IEPs; implementing IEPs; review of IEPS; monitoring student progress; reassessingstudent progress (Alpha=.857: highly reliable).

<u>Scale 2</u>: <u>Individual student focused scale (*ideal*)</u> – items as Scale 1 (Alpha=.934: very highly reliable).

<u>Scale 3</u>: Collaborative scale (*current*) – items: withdrawal of students for small group instruction; collaborating with other teachers; liaising with parents; liaising with principal on SEN issues; co-ordinating IEP meetings; formulating inclusion/SEN plan; implementing inclusion/SEN plan; acting as staff consultant on SEN issues; liaison SENO/NCSE; liaising with psychological services; liaising with other external professionals; liaising with special education inspectorate; liaising with feeder/follow-on schools; staff development/in-service training; team teaching for SEN students (Alpha=.848: highly reliable).

<u>Scale 4: Collaborative scale (ideal)</u> – items as Scale 3 (Alpha=.931: very highly reliable).

<u>Scale 5</u>: Administration scale (*current*) – items: record keeping; report writing; applying for exam concessions; applying for subject exemptions; timetabling additional support; co-ordinating/allocating SNA duties; providing substitute cover (Alpha=.675: marginally reliable).

<u>Scale 6</u>: Administration scale (*ideal*) – items as Scale 5 (Alpha=.768: reliable).

The first exercise after scale construction and reliability testing was to calculate the means of the scales. Distributions of means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3-24 to 3-26.

Table 3-24 to 3-26 Mean distributions for individual student focus, collaboration and administration scales (roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers)

Table 3-24

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Individual student focused scale (current)	23.65	9.10	592
Individual student focused scale (ideal)	17.96	9.54	531

Table 3-25

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Collaborative scale (current)	43.27	11.76	502
Collaborative scale (ideal)	30.68	13.20	432

Table 3-26

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Administration scale (current)	20.06	6.21	525
Administration scale (ideal)	18.15	6.70	465

Note: The lower the score on each scale, the greater the importance attached to the scaled items; missing values are excluded.

The mean distributions showed that respondents tended to allocate greater importance to items that they would *ideally* like to see attached to the roles and responsibilities of the LS/R teacher/co-ordinator in their school rather than to those they perceive to attach *currently* to the position on each scale. In an ideal situation, the importance respondents attached to collaborative work and to work with individual students increased more markedly than did administrative work. The most notable increase in importance as measured by mean values was to items on the collaborative scale. Even in an 'ideal' situation, however, respondents attached less importance to collaborative items overall than to items that focus on individual students, or even to administration.

The next task was to assess the strength of the relationship between each of the current and ideal scales. Given the ordinal levels of measurement of each scale, the most appropriate measure was Spearman's rank order correlation (rho). Table 3-27 presents the results for the correlations of each pair of scales.

Table 3-27 Rank order correlations of the current and ideal scales on individual student focus, collaboration and administration (roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers)

Scale Correlations	rho	Coefficient of determination (% of variance explained)	Significance level	N
Individual student focused scales (current and ideal)	.548	30.03	Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)	505
Collaboration scales (current and ideal)	.438	19.18	Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)	402
Administration scales (current and ideal)	.653	42.64	Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)	447

Note: The correlation coefficient was accepted as 'weak' if between 0 and 0.3; 'moderate' if higher than 0.3 and up to 0.6; strong if above 0.6 (Connolly, 2007: 95).

There was a moderately strong correlation between the perceived responsibilities grouped on the current and ideal 'student focused' scale, and for the items grouped on the 'collaborative' scale, and a strong correlation on items grouped on the 'administration' scales, ⁵ indicating that if a high importance was attached to items in the current situation these were also likely to been seen as of high importance in an ideal situation. The proportion of the variance explained was greatest in the case of the administrative scale and least in the case of the collaborative scale. All correlations were statistically significant. The rho values and coefficients of determination indicated that the greatest gap between current and ideal responsibilities, as perceived by respondents, was in relation to collaborative activities. In other words, the greatest shift in respondents' perceptions of the greatest importance in the LS/R role from the current to the ideal situation was a much higher importance attached to collaborative work.

Given that more children with disabilities and special educational needs have been enrolled in the mainstream primary sector for a longer period of time than the secondlevel sector, and given that accordingly learning support and special education roles are more embedded in primary schools, differences in the role perceptions of teachers in

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⁵ It should be borne in mind when interpreting the administration scale that the Cronbach's alpha value was less than .7.

both sectors were expected. The role perceptions scores of teachers on each of the scales, by school sector, were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test as this is the appropriate test for ordinal data. The Mann-Whitney U test is the non-parametric version of the t test and compares medians rather than means. It then evaluates whether the ranks for two groups differ significantly (Pallant, 2005: 291). The results on each of the scales are presented in Table 3-28.

Table 3-28 Post-primary and primary teachers (roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers): Mann-Whitney U test scores on the current and ideal scales on individual student focus, collaboration and administration

Scales	Mean rank	Z value	Asymp significance level	N
Individual student focused scale (current) Post-primary teachers Primary teachers	354.49 250.46	-7.355	p<.01	262 330
Individual student focused scale (ideal) Post-primary teachers Primary teachers	272.73 260.53	915	NS	238 293
Collaborative scale (current) Post-primary teachers Primary teachers	259.24 245.26	-1.073	NS	224 278
Collaborative scale (ideal) Post-primary teachers Primary teachers	200.99 229.03	-2.322	p<.05	193 239
Administration scale (ideal) Post-primary teachers Primary teachers	216.96 249.25	-2.594	p<.01	234 231

Note: The lower the rank on each scale, the greater the importance attached to the scaled items; missing values are excluded; the administration scale (current) was not tested as its alpha value was less than .7; NS=not significant.

Primary teachers saw significantly greater importance attaching to activities focused on individual students (such as IEP development, review and implementation, monitoring student progress etcetera.) than did post-primary teachers, as part of the current LS/R

teacher role. No significant difference emerged between the two groups when it came to perceptions of the ideal role of the LS/R teacher on this dimension.

Similarly, no significant difference emerged for collaborative items (such as liaison/collaboration with parents, principals, other teachers and professionals) in the current LS/R role. With collaborative work in an ideal situation, however, post-primary teachers significantly more often attached higher importance to it than did primary teachers – perhaps indicating the greater diversity of staff and personnel with whom the post-primary teacher must liaise. They also placed a higher value significantly more often than did primary teachers on the importance of administrative activities (such as applying for exemptions and concessions and report writing) in an ideal situation.

It was felt there could be important difference in the views of principals and teachers regarding the roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers. Table 3-2929 and Table 3-30 present the distributions for the post-primary and primary sectors.

Table 3-29 Principals and teachers, post-primary sector (roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers) Mann-Whitney U test scores on the current and ideal scales on individual student focus, collaboration and administration

Scales	Mean rank	Z value	Asymp significance level	N
Individual student focused scale				
(current)				
Teachers	210.99	002	NS	262
Principals	211.01	002	IND	159
Individual student focused scale (ideal)				
Teachers	181.59	-3.268	n < 01	238
Principals	219.70	-3.206	p<.01	154
Collaborative scale (current)				
Teachers	206.95	-3.998	n< 01	224
Principals	161.31	-3.776	p<.01	152
Collaborative scale (ideal)				
Teachers	161.05	-1.635	NS	193
Principals	178.56	-1.033	IND	143
Administration scale (ideal)				
Teachers	201.00	-1.069	NS	234
Principals	188.55	-1.003	140	157

Note: The lower the rank on each scale, the greater the importance attached to the scaled items; missing values are excluded; the administration scale (current) was not tested as its alpha value was less than .7; NS=not significant.

Among post-primary respondents, no significant difference was found between teachers and principals in the importance they perceived in student-focused activities as part of the current LS/R role. A significant difference emerged, however, in how they saw the role in an ideal situation. Here teachers were significantly more disposed, while principals were less so, to individual student-focused activities. On collaborative activities, post-primary teachers attached significantly less importance to this element of the current LS/R role. However, it was clear that for the ideal role, teachers and

principals were much closer on the importance attached to collaborative activities. There was no significant difference between the teachers and the principals concerning collaborative activities in the ideal LS/R role. There was no significant difference in the importance attached by post-primary principals and teachers to administrative responsibilities as envisaged in the LS/R ideal role.

Table 3-30 Principals and teachers, primary sector (roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers) Mann-Whitney U test scores on the current and ideal scales on individual student focus, collaboration and administration

Scales	Mean rank	Z value	Asymp. significance level	N
Individual student focused scale				
(current)				
Teachers	240.04	-1.958	p<.05	330
Principals	266.71	-1.936	p<.03	167
Individual student focused scale (ideal)				
Teachers	215.43	-2.455	n < 01	293
Principals	246.91	-2.433	p<.01	159
Collaborative scale (current)				
Teachers	210.72	171	NS	278
Principals	208.58	1/1	NS	141
Collaborative scale (ideal)				
Teachers	180.61	-1.188	NS	239
Principals	194.42	-1.188		131
Administration scale (ideal)				
Teachers	177.44	865	NS	231
Principals	187.32	003	CND	130

Note: The lower the rank on each scale, the greater the importance attached to the scaled items; missing values are excluded; the Administration scale (current) was not tested as its alpha value was less than .7; NS=not significant.

At primary level, no significant differences surfaced between primary teachers and principals on the collaboration (current and ideal) or administration scales. On student-focused activities, primary teachers were significantly more likely than principals to perceive student-focused activities as of high importance in current and ideal situations.

3.3.5 Summary

Teachers and principals were asked for their opinions on the most important tasks for LS/R teachers in current and ideal situations. These were then divided into three areas – individual student focus; collaborative focus; and administrative focus. Overall, the main difference found was in collaborative focus tasks. Post-primary principals see the collaborative, middle-management-type tasks as being more important. At primary level teachers were more student focused.

In summary, the main areas identified by primary and post-primary teachers as core components of the LS/R role were as follows.

Teachers' views of currently important tasks

- ♦ Teaching students in small group or individual settings.
- ♦ Identifying students with special educational needs.
- At primary level, developing and implementing IEPs and record-keeping.
- ♦ At post-primary level, applying for exam concessions, timetabling and liaison with the principal and parents featured as other key tasks.

Teachers' views of currently relatively less important tasks

- ♦ Liaising with the Department of Education, special educational needs inspector.
- ◆ Providing substitute cover for colleagues.
- ♦ Staff development in special educational needs.
- ♦ Team teaching.
- ♦ Co-ordinating special needs assistants (SNAs).

Teachers' views of important tasks in ideal situations

- ♦ Collaborating with other teachers.
- ♦ Identification of students with SEN.
- ♦ Collaborating with parents.
- ◆ Implementing and review of IEPs.

Principals' views

By and large, principals concurred with this estimation of the most important tasks for the LS/R teacher though collaboration with other teachers, screening and identification of students were accorded higher ratings in both current and ideal situations.

Three task types: individual student focus; collaborative focus; administrative focus. The 32 tasks were assigned to three different groups: those focusing on the individual student; those focusing on the collaborative aspects of the role; and tasks which focused on the administrative aspects of the role. All respondents tended to allocate greater importance to items they would ideally like to see attached to the roles and responsibilities of the LS/R teacher/co-ordinator in their school rather than to those they perceived to attach currently to the position on each of the scales, especially in relation to collaborative and student-focused work. All correlations on the scales were statistically significant. The rho values and coefficients of determination indicated that the greatest gap between the importance of current and ideal responsibilities, as perceived by respondents, was in collaborative activities.

When the patterns of responses from primary and post-primary teachers were compared, it was evident that primary teachers attached significantly greater importance to activities focused on individual students (such as IEP development, review and implementation, monitoring student progress) than did post-primary teachers, as part of the current LS/R teacher role. However, post-primary teachers perceived individual student-focused activities as having greater importance when it came to the ideal LS/R role. As for collaborative work, in an ideal situation, post-primary teachers gave it higher importance significantly more often. They also placed a higher value significantly more often than did primary teachers on the importance of administrative activities (such as applying for exemptions and concessions and report writing) in an ideal situation.

Scores on the scales of teachers and principals at both levels were compared. For post-primary teachers and principals a difference emerged in how they saw the individual student focus of the role of LS/R teacher in an ideal situation. Here teachers were significantly more disposed than principals to attach importance to individual student-

focused activities. In collaborative activities, post-primary teachers – in significantly greater numbers than principals – felt that such responsibilities formed a less important element of the LS/R role at the present time. However, the level of importance attached by post-primary teachers to collaborative work increased substantially in the ideal situation. No significant differences were evident between primary teachers and principals regarding collaboration or administration activities. However, primary teachers were significantly more likely than principals to perceive student-focused activities as of high importance in both the current and ideal situations. Thus, it appears from the data that principals view the collaborative and administrative aspects of the LS/R teacher's role as more important than teachers did. It seems principals accord a middle-management function to the role.

3.3.6 Implications

- These findings would suggest a need for an increased emphasis on collaborative work, in addition to the focus on individual student-focused and administrative elements, in the professional formation and development of all teachers in initial, induction and continuing in-career teacher education, but particularly for LS/R teachers.
- ♦ It also points to a need for an increased emphasis on collaborative work as part of whole-school development and particularly the provision of structures and processes to support such work.
- ♦ The international research has placed a great deal of emphasis on incorporating the LS/R co-ordinating role into the senior management team of schools (Szwed, 2007a&b; Abbott, 2007; Layton, 2005) see Chapter 1 for further detail.

This would suggest that collaborative work and leadership training should form a strong component of the formation of the LS/R teacher.

♦ The findings here indicate the levels of change required in school cultures by the movement towards more inclusive schooling. This involves changing from the traditional culture of the teacher as 'king' or 'queen' of their own classroom, working relatively autonomously alongside, but separate, from other teachers towards a new professionalism where collaboration and teamwork form an important dimension of the teacher's role.

This 'unsettling' of the traditional roles will require considerable leadership from principals and support from the Department of Education and Science in its processes and timetable regulations, as well as school structures to support the change.

3.4 Part Three of the Questionnaire: LS/R Teachers' Professional Development

Introduction

Currently, there is no Department of Education and Science requirement for a teacher to have a recognised postgraduate qualification in special education in order to teach pupils with special educational needs. Those registered as teachers can take up posts as teachers of students with special educational needs. At second level, it was recommended that teachers appointed to 'remedial' posts had an acceptable qualification (DES 33/79). In Ireland, there are various options open to teachers seeking qualifications and courses in SEN (see Chapter 1, Section 1:8). At present, the Department of Education and Science supports a number of opportunities for teachers to undertake professional development in special education, including 276-funded places on postgraduate courses (DES, 2006: 15).

In this research project, the third area explored in the questionnaire was LS/R teacher professional development. Questions relating to this area can be subdivided into two sections: previous professional development in SEN; and future professional development requirements in SEN. The question types ranged from the ranking and rating of options to open and closed questions. Some teachers did not answer every question, hence the total number of responses in the tables varies.

3.4.1 Previous professional development

A number of questions were related to previous professional development. LS/R teachers were asked to indicate whether they had participated in professional development in SEN and what type of SEN qualification, if any, they had obtained. These findings were then related to variables including geographical location of school and school disadvantage status. Thus, a picture was built up of the professional development background of the LS/R teachers with main responsibility for SEN in a

representative sample of schools in the post-primary and primary mainstream sectors at the onset of inclusive education in Ireland.

Teachers' Participation in SEN-Related Professional Development

The findings show that for LS/R teachers working in SEN who responded to this questionnaire, almost equal numbers in both sectors had undertaken some form of professional development or in-service (Table 3-31): 87.1 per cent of post-primary teachers and 88 per cent of primary teachers stated they had participated in SEN-related professional development.

Table 3-31 Previous professional development in SEN (all types – certified/non-certified)

	Leve	el of school	Total
	Post-primary	Total	
Yes	331	338	669
Tes	87.1%	88.0%	87.6%
No	49	46	95
NO	12.9%	12.0%	12.4%
Total	380	384	764
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

This sample shows that most LS/R teachers (87.6 per cent) with main responsibility for SEN in their schools, and engaged in working with children with special educational needs, had undertaken some professional development in SEN, whether certified or non-certified. These responses also indicate that approximately one-eighth of respondent LS/R teachers had no professional development or in-service of any type in special education. On the one hand, the high proportion of those who had undertaken SEN professional development is a positive feature of the findings. On the other hand, the fact that 12.4 per cent overall of LS/R teachers with substantial responsibilities for SEN in their schools had not engaged in any relevant in-career training is a matter for concern.

The nature of the professional development in SEN was probed further. It became clear that the range of in-service activities in which respondents had engaged varied enormously – from two-hour sessions to masters degree programmes. It was thus very important to assess the proportion of LS/R teachers who had engaged in certified incareer professional development.

Certified In-Career Professional Development: Qualifications in SEN

In response to an open question on prior qualifications in SEN, two-thirds indicated some qualification and a minority had more than one SEN-related qualification (Table 3-32). Significantly fewer primary teachers (38.5 per cent) had a qualification than post-primary teachers (87.7 per cent).

Table 3-32 Certified qualification in SEN

	Level of	school	Total
	Post-primary	Primary	- Totat
Yes	334	153	487
ies	87.7%	38.5%	62.6%
No	47	244	291
NO	12.3%	61.5%	37.4%
Total	381	397	778
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: missing values are excluded.

Overall, 37.4 per cent of these LS/R teachers indicated they had no qualification in special educational needs. This figure, however, masks primary–post-primary differences which were statistically significant (χ^2 =198.298; df=1; p<.001). At primary level, the lack of a SEN qualification was greater – 61.5 per cent of teachers had no SEN-related qualification. This may be related, in part, to the recent sizeable increase in numbers of SEN teachers. It is all the more serious since respondents (because of the methodology used) were those with main responsibility for special educational needs in their schools. It certainly indicates a serious concern for policy-makers, school management, parents and teacher educators. It is of greatest concern for the primary sector. There were notable differences in duration and certification of the qualifications

undertaken by primary and post-primary teachers also. These were explored to identify the variation in courses.

Qualifications in SEN

Further analysis was performed on the responses to the question on qualifications in SEN (Table 3-33). The range of answers on the type of qualification held was wide ranging. Most qualified teachers (those who had undertaken certified in-career professional development in special educational needs) held a diploma. Others indicated that their qualification stemmed from modules in masters degree programmes, others had gained qualifications through participation in Department of Education and Science courses, some cited short summer courses and online courses as their main qualification in SEN and still others indicated that their SEN 'qualification' derived from modules in their initial teacher qualification.

Table 3-33 Main SEN qualification

	Level of school		Total
	Post-primary	Primary	Total
Postgrad/dip or masters in SEN	284	121	405
or LS	85.0%	79.1%	83.2%
Other special-ed related courses	45	25	70
Other special-ed related courses	13.5%	16.3%	14.4%
Online special-ed related courses	5	7	12
Offine special-ed related courses	1.5%	4.6%	2.5%
Total	334	153	487
1 ouu	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Missing values are excluded.

When the type of certified professional development participated in by teachers was analysed, it revealed that overall the most prevalent qualification was a graduate diploma in SEN or a graduate diploma in learning support. This was held by 278 post-primary teachers and 118 primary teachers. Some also held additional qualifications. It must be emphasised, however, that the total figure for teachers stating they had a SEN qualification is 487. This represents only 60 per cent of the total number of respondents. If non-respondents to this question were to be interpreted as not having a qualification,

the percentage of SEN-uncertified teachers would rise to an overall level of 40 per cent, that would break down into 16.3 per cent of post-primary and 63.3 per cent of primary teacher respondents without a qualification in SEN. This finding is of concern as respondents to this questionnaire are the senior SEN staff in the school and therefore the most likely to have a SEN qualification.

Previous Professional Development and the Teaching-Learning Environment

The previous professional development of teachers was analysed with respect to aspects of the teaching-learning environment to determine significant relationships, if any. Three aspects of previous professional development were considered: having a SEN qualification, the type of qualification in SEN and SEN in-service attendance. The features of the teaching-learning environment used in this analysis were province, rural/conurbation setting, disadvantage status, post-primary school type and teacher role choice (whether a teacher had chosen to work in the area or not). Table 3-34 summarises the findings.

Table 3-34 Professional development and aspects of teaching/learning environment

Professional development	Province	Rural/ conurbation	Disadvantage status	Post- primary school type	School gender mix	Teacher role choice
Possession of qualification in SEN Type of SEN qualification	Difference but not significant Difference but not significant	Difference is highly significant p<.01 Very similar	Difference is significant p< .05	Very little difference Very similar	Difference is very highly significant p<.001	Difference is very highly significant p<.001
SEN in-service attendance	Very similar	Very similar	Very similar	Very similar	Similar	Difference is highly significant p< .01

Factors potentially influencing possession of a qualification in SEN

Qualification and province

LS/R teachers in Ulster (52.3 per cent) were less likely to have a SEN qualification in comparison to teachers in Dublin (71.5 per cent), Leinster (minus Dublin) (62.8 per cent), Connacht (62.4 per cent) and Munster (61.4 per cent). This was not a significant difference, however.

Qualification and rural/conurbation setting

The geographical location of a school was found to be significant in terms of qualification. When the chi-square statistic was calculated for geographical location and SEN qualification, a statistically significant difference was found (χ^2 =8.526; df=1; p< .01) Thus, teachers working in cities and large urban areas were more likely to have a qualification in SEN than their colleagues in rural areas.

Qualification and disadvantage

Teachers working in schools with disadvantage status were more likely to have a qualification (71.7 per cent) than those working in non-disadvantaged areas (60.8 per cent). When the chi-square statistic was calculated for disadvantage and SEN qualification, a statistically significant difference was found (χ^2 =6.377; df=1; p< .05).

Qualification and type of post-primary school

The type of post-primary school was not found to be a factor influencing the holding of SEN qualification. Teachers in all three sectors – secondary (87.7 per cent), VEC (90.1 per cent) and community/comprehensive (88.3 per cent) – were equally likely to have a qualification.

Qualification and school gender mix

When the data were examined to determine if school gender mix was a factor influencing SEN qualification, the difference transpired to be very highly significant. (χ^2 =28.746; df=2; ρ < .001) Teachers in all-girls' schools (83.8 per cent) were more likely to have such qualification compared to teachers in all-boys' schools (74.2 per cent) or teachers in mixed schools (57.9 per cent).

Qualification and role choice

Teachers who had voluntarily chosen to work in SEN were more likely to have a qualification (69 per cent) than were teachers who had not (45.2 per cent). This difference was very highly statistically significant when the chi-square was calculated (χ^2 =32.202; df=1; ρ <.001).

Factors influencing type of qualification in SEN

For those qualified in SEN, variation in type of qualification was slight when the various aspects of the teaching and learning environment were examined. When province was used to differentiate between LS/R teachers' qualifications, the highest percentage of LS/R teachers to have a graduate diploma was in Ulster (91.2 per cent, n=31) and the lowest percentage of teachers with qualifications holding a diploma was in Leinster (75.8 per cent, n=91). Correspondingly, more teachers in Leinster had a qualification stemming from other courses (20.8 per cent, n=25) than did teachers in Ulster (5.9 per cent, n=2).

Factors influencing SEN in-service attendance

Many teachers in both sectors indicated they had undertaken in-service in SEN. These figures were analysed to determine if differences could be accounted for by the variations in the teaching\learning environments. The most notable difference to emerge was between teachers who had chosen to work in SEN and those who had not. A total of 90 per cent of teachers who opted for SEN had undertaken in-service compared to 81 per cent of teachers who had not chosen to work in the area, but instead were allocated to it. When the chi-square statistic was calculated for role choice and SEN in-service, a highly statistically significant difference was found (X^2 =8.718; df =1; ρ < .01). Thus, it appears that teachers who chose SEN were more likely to attend in-service and develop skills in the area.

Summary

Most LS/R teachers with main responsibility for SEN in their schools and engaged in working with children with special educational needs, had undertaken some professional development in their area, whether certified or non-certified. Approximately one-eighth of respondent LS/R teachers had no professional

development or in-service of any type in special education. On the one hand, the high proportion of respondents who had undertaken SEN professional development is a positive feature of the findings. On the other hand, the fact that 12 per cent overall of LS/R teachers with substantial responsibilities for SEN in their schools had not engaged in any relevant in-career training is a matter for concern. Overall, 37 per cent of these LS/R teachers indicated they had no SEN qualification. This lack was statistically significantly greater at primary level. Most qualified LS/R teachers (those who had undertaken certified in-career professional development in SEN) held a diploma. Several factors affected whether LS/R teachers had a qualification, or had participated in SEN in-service. These were: living in a rural setting (less likely to have a qualification); teaching in a disadvantaged school (more likely to have a qualification); teaching in a girls' school (more like to have a qualification and more likely to have attended SEN in-service); and having actively chosen to work in the SEN area (more likely to have a qualification).

3.4.2 Professional development requirements

Introduction

This section of the results chapter focuses on the desired future professional development of LS/R teachers currently engaged in working in a specialist role with students with additional educational needs. In the survey questionnaire, a section was devoted to eliciting information on professional development requirements. Two inquiries were conducted within this section: on general professional development needs; and on potential course components for a programme of professional development. Three different question types were utilised to obtain the requisite detail. These included: an open question on the respondents' most urgent professional development requirements; a rating question on possible course components and, finally, two ranking questions, on possible course components and on a list of areas of potential interest. The responses included in the analysis for this section are from 417 primary schools and 399 post-primary schools. The responses from 408 principals – 196 primary and 212 post-primary – are included for some questions. Not all teachers or principals answered all questions which explains differing total figures in the tables of analysis. Respondent teachers formed four distinct sub-groups: primary or post-primary; and those with a qualification in SEN versus those without. The main focus of interest is

the analysis of differences between the two education sectors and of differences between SEN-qualified and SEN-unqualified teachers.

Most Urgent Professional Development Requirements

Both teachers and principals were asked for their views on the most urgent professional development needs of teachers. LS/R teachers were given an open question that asked them to state their four most urgent professional development needs. Principals were given a similar open question that also asked them to list the four most urgent professional development requirements of SEN teachers in their school. A wide range of areas emerged from analysis of the responses. A lack of clarity emerged surrounding the role of SEN teachers in the responses and a tendency for many non-SEN related areas to fall within their remit. Responses from the open questions were coded and frequencies calculated. There was a consensus on the high frequency professional development areas among all the sub-groups. Results are given initially for the entire group of teachers, then for each of the two main groups (primary and post-primary) and then for the two most important of the four sub-groups — primary teachers without a SEN qualification and post-primary teachers without a SEN qualification. This is followed by the primary and post-primary principals' responses.

Teachers' Professional Development Needs

The total number of teachers responding to this open question was 642. This was evenly divided between primary (317) and post-primary (325) teachers. Examination of Table 3-35 shows that for the research sample, individual education plans (IEPs) dominate the list of teachers' professional development requirements. Other areas that featured strongly were knowledge of specific disabilities, administrative skills, testing diagnosis and assessment, teaching methodologies relevant to SEN and contact with experienced teachers. Of particular note was the high frequency of requests for general 'up-skilling' and unspecified courses and in-service.

Table 3-35 Combined primary and post-primary teachers professional development open (n=642)

Area requested for professional development	Frequency	Percentage
IEPs	128	19.9
General courses/in-service to up-skill	104	16.2
Information on various disabilities	72	11.2
Time (management and timetables)/co-ordination/admin	42	6.5
Testing: diagnosis and assessment	38	5.9
Teaching methodologies relevant to SEN	33	5.1
Contact with others etcetera.	29	4.5
IT skills/assistive technology	27	4.2
Dealing with emotional and behavioural issues	24	3.7
Whole-school approach to SEN	24	3.7
Speech and language supports	21	3.3
Resources: sourcing, using	21	3.3
Understanding psychological assessments	18	2.8
Policy and law	12	1.9
Mathematics supports	12	1.9

The data were examined further to gain more detailed insight into teachers' requests for professional development. Each sector was explored separately to establish different professional development needs that might exist between the sub-groups. To conduct the analysis, first the SPSS filter function was used to isolate the required data, and then a frequency analysis was performed using descending counts to identify most requested professional development for the sector.

Primary teachers professional development requests

When the professional development requests of the primary sector were examined, they formed a similar profile to the whole sample (see Table 3-36 below).

The analysis indicated that only primary teachers had sought professional development in speech and language. They also accounted for all of the requests for professional development in mathematics and literacy. Of note, too, was that the request for professional development on testing and diagnosis came mainly from the primary sector (30 out of the overall 38 requests) as did the request for contact with others (expressed variously as with 'experienced teachers' and with 'experts'). Further deconstruction of the data was undertaken to determine if there were differences attributable solely to the sub-group of primary teachers who did not have a SEN qualification.

Table 3-36 All primary teachers – professional development requests (n=317)

	Area requested for professional development	Frequency	Percentage
1	IEPs	52	16.4
2	General courses/in-service to up-skill	50	15.8
3	Information on various disabilities	38	12
4	Testing: diagnosis and assessment	30	9.5
5	Speech and language supports	21	6.6
6	Contact with experienced teachers etcetera.	17	5.4
7	Teaching methodologies relevant to SEN	13	4.1
8	Dealing with emotional and challenging behaviours	13	4.1
9	Time management/co-ordination/admin	12	3.8
10	Mathematics supports	12	3.8
11	Resources and materials	11	3.5
12	Understanding/Implementing psychological assessments	9	2.8
12	IT skills/assistive technology	9	2.8
12	Literacy support	9	2.8

Professional development requested by primary teachers without SEN qualification

The professional development requests of the large cohort of primary teachers without a SEN qualification are of particular interest. The analysis of their responses, Table 3-37 (below), revealed a very similar profile to teachers as a whole group. The differences that existed were found to be mainly in the relative importance attached to the areas.

Table 3-37 Professional development requested by primary teachers without SEN qualifications (n=187)

	Area requested for professional development	Frequency	Percentage
1	General courses/in-service to up-skill	31	16.6
2	IEPs	30	16.0
3	Information on various disabilities	21	11.2
4	Testing: diagnosis and assessment	19	10.2
5	Speech and language supports	12	6.4
6	Contact with others	10	5.3
6	Dealing with emotional and behavioural challenges	10	5.3
8	Teaching methodologies relevant to SEN	8	4.3
9	Mathematics supports	7	3.7
10	IT skills/assistive technology	6	3.2
10	Resources and materials	6	3.2
10	Literacy support	6	3.2
13	Time management/co-ordination/ organisation/admin	5	2.7
13	Whole-school approach	5	2.7
15	Understanding psychological assessments	3	1.6
16	Social skills development	2	1.1
16	Communication with parents	2	1.1
18	Team leading	1	.5
18	Policy and law	1	.5
18	Language support training (EFL/ESL)	1	.5

Again, the responses reflected the overall consensus on the three most requested professional development areas – general courses, IEPs and information on disabilities. The analysis also indicated four differences between the professional development requests of non-SEN qualified primary teachers' and the whole research sample, albeit there were insufficient cases to establish the strength of this significance. The four differences were a higher number of requests for 'testing and diagnosis', a higher number of requests for 'contact with expert others', and a concomitant diminution of requests for professional development on 'management and administration related areas' and 'understanding psychological assessments'. On a poignant note, the most urgent request from one teacher was 'a room to work in'.

Post-primary teachers professional development requests

When the post-primary teachers' professional development requirements were examined (Table 3-38), the differences that emerged between them and the total research sample professional development requirements were related to the comparative importance assigned to the areas.

Table 3-38 Post-primary professional development needs (n=325)

	Area requested for professional development	Frequency	Percentage
1	IEPs	76	23.4
2	General courses/in-service to up-skill	54	16.6
3	Info on various disabilities	34	10.5
4	Time management/co-ordination/organisation/admin	30	9.2
5	Teaching methodologies relevant to SEN	20	6.2
6	Whole-school approach	19	5.8
7	IT skills/assistive technology	18	5.5
8	Contact with others	12	3.7
9	Dealing with emotional and behavioural challenges	11	3.4
10	Resources and materials	10	3.1
11	Understanding psychological assessments	9	2.8
11	Policy and law	9	2.8
13	Testing: diagnosis and assessment	8	2.5
14	Team leading	5	1.5
14	Language support training (ESL)	5	1.5
16	Team teaching/collaboration	2	.6
16	Social skills development	2	.6
18	Role defined	1	.3

The areas that were particularly important for the post-primary sector were time management/organisation/co-ordination, teaching strategies and whole-school approaches, policy/law and ESL. The areas that decreased in preference were mathematics support and literacy support.

Professional development requirements of post-primary teachers without a SEN qualification

Post-primary teachers without a SEN qualification only accounted for 30 of the sample responding to the open question on professional development in the questionnaire. Table 3-39 outlines the most urgent professional development needs of this group. Again, the top three areas were general courses, IEPs and information on various disabilities.

Table 3-39 Professional development requests of post-primary teachers without SEN qualification (n=30)

	Area requested for professional development	Frequency	Percent
1	General courses/in-service to up-skill	10	33.3
2	IEPs	5	16.7
3	Information on various disabilities	4	13.3
4	Resources and materials	2	6.7
5	Understanding psychological assessments	1	3.3
6	Teaching methodologies relevant to SEN	1	3.3
7	IT skills/assistive technology	1	3.3
8	Time management/co-ordination/organisation/admin	1	3.3
9	Contact with others	1	3.3
10	Dealing with emotional and behavioural challenges	1	3.3
11	Whole-school approach	1	3.3
12	Language support training (ESL)	1	3.3
13	Testing: diagnosis and assessment	1	3.3

Given the differences between primary and post-primary schools in organisational structure, school size, SEN provision and age range of students, it was anticipated that differences would emerge in an analysis of requested professional development. The data indicated relatively few differences. Rather, similarities exceeded differences.

Principals' views on professional development needs – open question

Principals' views were solicited on the most important professional development areas for their SEN staff. This was an open question and the extraordinarily long list of areas covered in the responses is a further testimony of the all-encompassing role that SEN

teachers are expected to undertake as part of their post. Principals and teachers agreed on the most important professional development areas. Areas cited by single respondents are omitted. Table 3-40 lists the top six professional development areas primary principals identified as of immediate importance.

Table 3-40 Professional development areas for SEN teachers – according to primary principals (n=178)

Professional development area requested	Frequency	Percentage
IEPs	32	18.0
Testing: diagnosis and assessment	29	16.3
Information on various disabilities	26	14.6
SEN teaching methodologies	13	7.3
Admin and planning	9	6
Dealing with challenging behaviours	8	4.5

Areas shown are not appreciably different to those proposed by primary teachers in Table 3-36 but differ only in relative importance.

Table 3-41 Professional development areas for SEN teachers, according to post-primary principals (n=173)

Professional development area requested	Frequency	Percentage
IEPs	51	29.5
SEN teaching methodologies (differentiation/team teaching)	23	13.3
Information on various disabilities	15	8.7
Courses and in-service	11	5.2
IT skills/assistive technology	8	4.6
Resources/sources	5	2.9

Likewise, the professional development needs identified by post-primary principals in Table 3-41 are not dissimilar to those identified by post-primary teachers in Table 3-38 Overall, there is consensual agreement between LS/R teachers and principals on the most important areas for teacher professional development for those working in special education.

Professional development needs (open question) additional detail: specific in-service requests

As noted in the analysis of the open questions on professional development needs, many teachers and principals requested professional development on particular disabilities. These areas were listed and tallied and are presented in Table 3-42 below. Not all respondents specified in which areas they required professional development, hence these findings only reflect the needs of a portion of respondents.

Here, in the open question on professional development requirements, dyslexia, autism ADHD, dyspraxia and Asperger syndrome were identified as the main areas of concern. It is interesting to compare this unsolicited information on specific areas felt to be of importance, with responses to a ranking question on the same topic (see Table 3-43 below).

Professional development priority: specific areas relating to current and incoming student needs

During the pilot phase, information on types of disability featured strongly in teachers' requests for professional development. Consequently, the questionnaire included a question to delve further into the specific areas teachers were anxious to explore. Therefore, a fourth question on professional development requirements asked teachers to respond to a range of topics and to prioritise four areas which were their highest priorities with reference to students in their school. Results were tabulated in order of the frequency each area was cited as a first priority (Table 3-43). This was further analysed to determine differences, if any, between teachers with SEN qualification and those without (Table 3-44).

Rank of school professional development priority needs

As one of the professional development-related questions in the questionnaire, teachers were asked to rank the four most important professional development needs for current or incoming students in their school. The list of options was based on the various disabilities categories used by the Department of Education and Science in SEN-related circulars (SP ED 02/05) (DES, 2005a). Analysis of the results revealed, once again, a strong similarity in responses from both sectors (see Table 3-43).

Table 3-42 Professional development needs (open question) additional detail: specific inservice requests

Area in which LS/R professional development required	Post- primary principals	Primary principals	Post-Primary LS/R teachers	Primary LS/R teachers	Total
Dyslexia	8	13	20	34	75
Autism/ASD	9	11	19	27	66
ADHD	6	6	11	19	42
Dyspraxia	5	4	13	13	35
Asperger syndrome	4	2	13	11	30
EBD		3	7	5	15
Down syndrome		1	4	9	14
Behavioural			6	6	12
MGLD	1		4	3	8
Dyscalculia	1		1	5	7
Social skill development		1		6	7
SLD	3	3			6
DCD	1		1	2	4
Blindness	1	1		2	4
ODD		3	1		4
Moderate LD	1		1	1	3
Physical disability		1	1	1	3
Epilepsy		1		1	2
Pragmatic semantic disorders				2	2
Tourette syndrome	1				1
SEB	1				1
Motor skills		1			1
Elective mutism				1	1

The areas most frequently singled out for professional development were mild general learning disability, dyslexia, behavioural problems, literacy difficulties and emotional disturbance. Results on professional development (Table 3-43) corroborate these findings where similar broad areas were identified as important for school needs.

Table 3-43 Professional development priority areas for school needs

Combined prim & post-primary	Freq	%	Primary	Freq	%	Post-primary	Freq	%
Mild learning disability	115	16.6	Dyslexia	56	15.6	Mild learning disability	64	19.1
Dyslexia	98	14.1	Mild learning disability	51	14.2	Behavioural problems	47	14.0
Behavioural problems	79	11.4	Literacy difficulties	46	12.8	Dyslexia	42	12.5
Literacy difficulties	78	11.2	Speech and language difficulties	36	10.0	Literacy difficulties	32	9.6
Emotional disturbance	57	8.2	Behavioural problems	32	8.9	Emotional disturbance	31	9.3
Speech and language difficulty	45	6.5	Emotional disturbance	26	7.2	Borderline mild learning disability	21	6.3
Borderline mild learning disability	36	5.2	Autistic spectrum disorder	25	7.0	Asperger syndrome	18	5.4
Asperger syndrome	32	4.6	Borderline mild learning disability	15	4.2	ADHD	11	3.3
Autistic spectrum disorder	31	4.5	Asperger syndrome	14	3.9	English as second language	10	3.0
Numeracy difficulties	21	3.0	Numeracy difficulties	13	3.6	Dyspraxia	9	2.7
Dyspraxia	19	2.7	Dyspraxia	10	2.8	Speech and language difficulties	9	2.7
ADHD	17	2.4	Dyscalculia	7	1.9	Numeracy difficulties	8	2.4
Down syndrome	13	1.9	Down syndrome	7	1.9	Moderate learning disability	6	1.8
English as second language	11	1.6	ADHD	6	1.7	Autistic spectrum disorder	6	1.8
Dyscalculia	10	1.4	Visual impairment	3	.8	Down syndrome	6	1.8
Moderate learning disability	9	1.3	Moderate learning disability	3	.8	Physical difficulty	4	1.2
Visual impairment	7	1.0	Travelling community	3	.8	Visual impairment	4	1.2
Physical difficulty	5	.7	Severe-profound learning disability	2	.6	Dyscalculia	3	.9
Travelling community	5	.7	Physical difficulty	1	.3	Travelling community	2	.6
Severe-profound learning disability	3	.4	Hearing impairment	1	.3	Severe-profound learning disability	1	.3
Hearing impairment	1	.1	Chronic illness	1	.3	Epilepsy	1	.3
Epilepsy	1	.1	English as second language	1	.3			
Chronic illness	1	.1						

Having a SEN qualification influenced the relative importance of some areas identified as school priorities to some degree. By and large, the differences were not very great (Table 3-44), however. Perhaps most notable here is the very low priority given to some areas including chronic illness, epilepsy, hearing impairment and severe-profound learning disability.

Table 3-44 Priority areas for school needs – teachers with and without SEN qualifications

	Yes/	No SEN qu					
Priority areas for school needs	7	Yes		No	Total		
		%		%		%	
Mild general learning disability	77	18.2	33	13.0	110	16.2	
Dyslexia	59	13.9	35	13.8	94	13.9	
Behavioural problems	57	13.4	21	8.3	78	11.5	
Literacy difficulties	40	9.4	36	14.2	76	11.2	
Emotional disturbance	39	9.2	17	6.7	56	8.3	
Speech and language difficulties	25	5.9	20	7.9	45	6.6	
Borderline mild learning disability	18	4.2	18	7.1	36	5.3	
Asperger Syndrome	21	5.0	11	4.3	32	4.7	
Autistic spectrum disorder	11	2.6	19	7.5	30	4.4	
Numeracy difficulties	10	2.4	11	4.3	21	3.1	
Dyspraxia	13	3.1	6	2.4	19	2.8	
ADHD	12	2.8	4	1.6	16	2.4	
Down Syndrome	7	1.7	6	2.4	13	1.9	
English as second language	9	2.1	2	.8	11	1.6	
Dyscalculia	3	.7	6	2.4	9	1.3	
Moderate learning disability	7	1.7	1	.4	8	1.2	
Visual impairment	5	1.2	2	.8	7	1.0	
Physical difficulty	5	1.2	0	.0	5	.7	
Travelling community	4	.9	1	.4	5	.7	
Severe-profound learning disability	1	.2	2	.8	3	.4	
Hearing impairment	0	.0	1	.4	1	.1	
Epilepsy	1	.2	0	.0	1	.1	
Chronic illness	0	.0	1	.4	1	.1	
Total	424	100%	253	100%	677	100%	

Summary: Teacher Professional Development Needs in SEN – Areas Sought

In summary, the professional development requirements educed through the postal questionnaire were similar in both educational sectors and were agreed on by LS/R teachers and principals. The wide variety of content in the requests for professional development courses indicated that LS/R teachers' roles encompassed a substantial range of areas. The evidence of a need for 'role definition' needs to be taken seriously by schools, and the official Department of Education and Science guidelines on learning support and inclusion implemented promptly, to give role definition to teachers employed in the LS/R role. Furthermore, the finding that the professional development requirements for SEN qualified and SEN unqualified teachers were strikingly similar is noteworthy. The need for professional development that promotes teacher resilience and promotes the concept of teachers as self-motivated professionals is underscored by the lack of self-confidence and need for basic SEN courses expressed by even those teachers with qualifications. Resilience refers to the capacity for successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances and is strongly emphasised in recent educational discourse because of the high proportion of teachers who leave the profession in the first five years (Le Cornu, 2009). Professional development programmes should include the promotion of self-sustainability so that teachers become resilient in addressing teaching dilemmas.

3.4.3 Content suggestions for professional development programmes

The key focus of this research was to determine the professional development requirements of mainstream primary and post-primary teachers working in special education. The findings relating to this focus were outlined in section 3.4.2. An associated research objective was to gather recommendations for appropriate course content for professional development programmes in SEN. Information pertaining to this aspect of the research was sought through two questions on the questionnaire. Teachers were offered a list of potential course components for a professional development programme in SEN. First, they were asked to rate them for importance on a scale of 1 to 5 in relation to their own professional development needs. Second, they were asked to rank the ten areas they considered should form the core components of a professional development programme in SEN. LS/R teachers' ratings of the importance of the listed potential elements of courses for their personal professional needs were analysed by utilising the creation of subscales, and responses were classified by school

sector. For rankings, results were tabulated for primary and post-primary teachers separately and for teachers with and without SEN qualifications.

There was a strong similarity in the choice of course content by primary and post-primary LS/R teachers in their rankings. Both sectors rated types of learning difficulties, teaching strategies; language and literacy and teaching mathematics in the top five choices of course content. There was a lesser degree of concurrence for the least important components of a programme with both sectors agreeing only three of these – philosophy, presentation skills and conducting research. There was also general agreement between the ratings of teachers with a SEN qualification and those without.

Rating of Possible Components of a Course

Teachers were offered a large number of possible professional development options. Of 36, it was possible to identify three scales measuring different dimensions of professional development, two of which related to the scales identified in the analysis of their perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of LS/SEN teachers. These were: a student-focused scale; a collaborative scale; and a curriculum-focused scale. Items were derived from question 2.4 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 5 and Appendix 8). As with the roles and responsibilities scales, each professional development scale was tested for reliability using an alpha coefficient of reliability, Cronbach's alpha (Cohen *et al*, 2007: 148, 506; Pallant, 2005: 91). The scales with their composite items and reliability levels are presented below (reliability levels are as suggested by Cohen *et al*, 2007: 148). Again, given the ordinal level of measurement, scale construction and analysis used non-parametric methods.

<u>Scale 1</u>: Individual student-focused scale – ratings of the following professional development items: psychological development in childhood; psychological development in adolescence; different types of learning difficulty and their characteristics; assessment of learning difficulties; interpreting psychological assessments; developing an education plan for a student with SEN (Alpha=.754: reliable).

<u>Scale 2</u>: Collaborative scale – ratings of the following professional development items: school policy and planning in SEN; working with parents of children with SEN; developing skills in collaborating with other teachers; access to other teachers working in SEN; establishing links between special schools and mainstream schools (Alpha=.772: reliable).

<u>Scale 3</u>: Curriculum-focused scale – ratings of the following professional development items: developing alternative curriculum for students with SEN; teaching strategies for students with SEN; teaching history, geography and science to students with SEN; teaching English as a second language; social skills training; health education for students with SEN; language and literacy for students with SEN; mathematics for students with SEN; developing materials for use with students with SEN (Alpha=.821: highly reliable).

The scores of teachers on each of the scales, by school sector, were tested using the Mann-Whitney U test as this is the appropriate test for ordinal data. Table 3-45 presents the results on each scale.

Table 3-45 Post-primary and primary teachers (perceived professional development needs of LS/SEN teachers): Mann-Whitney U Test scores on the scales on student focus, collaboration and curriculum focus

Scales	Mean rank	Z value	Asymp significance level	N
Student-focused scale				
Post-primary teachers	254.07	361	NS	248
Primary teachers	250.46			264
Collaborative scale				
Post-primary teachers	264.27	-1.719	NS	262
Primary teachers	287.55			290
Curriculum-focused scale				
Post-primary teachers	254.89	-1.788	NS	252
Primary teachers	278.77			282

Note: The lower the rank on each scale, the greater the importance attached to the scaled items.

Missing values are excluded. NS=not significant.

The rankings from the Mann-Whitney U test show that differences between primary and post-primary LS/R teachers in their ratings on the importance of their personal perceived professional development needs reflect some of the differences observable in their ratings on the ideal roles of the LS/R teachers. This is insofar as primary teachers attached a little more importance to student-focused items and post-primary teachers attached more importance to collaborative items. Post-primary teachers attached greater importance to curriculum related items. However, none of these relationships was statistically significant at the .05 level or better.

Teachers' ranking of key course areas

In addition to rating course components, additional information was sought on the ten most important areas to include in a professional development programme on SEN. Teachers were asked to rank from 1 to 10 the key areas they thought ought to be integrated in a programme.

The areas most frequently ranked first mirror the ratings given for aspects of a potential course and give added support to the reliability of the data on desired course components. Here, as with the ratings for course components, the highest ranking elements were types of learning difficulty, assessment of learning difficulty, teaching strategies, developing education plans, language and literacy difficulties, school policy and planning for SEN, developing an alternative curriculum, psychological development, interpreting psychological assessments, and the law and SEN (Table 3-46).

Table 3-46 The top 10 areas most frequently ranked first as a course component to be included in a professional development programme in SEN

Com	Combined primary and post- primary teachers			Primary teachers				Post-primary teachers			
Rank	Area	N	%	Rank	Area	N	%	Rank	Area	N	%
1	Types of learning difficulty	125	21.9	1	Types of learning difficulty	80	25.4	1	Types of learning difficulty	45	17.5
2	Assessment of learning difficulties	79	13.8	2	Assessment of learning difficulties	53	16.8	2	Teaching strategies	34	13.2
3	Teaching strategies	74	12.9	3	Teaching strategies	40	12.7	3	Assessment of learning difficulties	26	10.1
4	Developing an education plan	38	6.6	4	Language and literacy difficulties	24	7.6	4	Developing an education plan	20	7.8
5	Language and literacy difficulties	36	6.3	5	Developing an alternative curriculum	18	5.7	5	Psychological development in adolescence	17	6.6
6	School policy and planning	30	5.2	6	Developing an education plan	18	5.7	6	School policy and planning	17	6.6
7	Developing an alternative curriculum	25	4.4	7	Psychological development in childhood	13	4.1	7	Language and literacy difficulties	12	4.7
8	Psychologic al developmen t in childhood	21	3.7	8	School policy and planning	13	4.1	8	Inclusion in mainstream classes	11	4.3
9	Psychologic al developmen t in adolescence	18	3.1	9	Interpreting psychological assessments	9	2.9	9	Psychological development in childhood	8	3.1
10	Interpreting psychologic al assessments	17	3.0	10	The law and SEN	8	2.5	10	Interpreting psychological assessments	8	3.1

Student-focused and curriculum-related items dominated LS/R teachers' top ten priorities for course content. Obviously, priority was affected by the immediate needs such in-career development would serve. Given the emphasis on collaboration in the teachers' ideal conceptions of the LS/R role, it might have been expected that collaboration would be correspondingly reflected in their professional development

priorities - especially in the case of the post-primary teachers who had valued collaboration highly in their ideal conception of the LS/R role. However, just one collaborative activity (school policy and planning) ranked in their top ten, in sixth place for primary and eighth place for post-primary teachers. Courses which explore and critique the theory and practice of inclusion and special education, such as sociology and philosophy, also received low rankings: one individual gave philosophy of inclusion top ranking with sociology of inclusion receiving none. Conducting research into special education ranked only just above the critical reflective courses mentioned at the very bottom of the rankings, with only one individual giving it top ranking. Nor was there any evidence of a desire for professional development in leadership skills in the responses to the open-ended questions. Given the international emphasis on the importance of research/evidence-based teaching and its importance to high-quality teaching and learning, of the need for leadership qualities in the SEN role, and of the need for a critical and reflective profession (see Chapter 1), the evident absence of such awareness among such a large cohort of LS/R teachers with the main responsibilities for SEN in their schools, and of their principals, is a matter of concern. Of course, it may be that the relatively recent development of inclusion in mainstream Irish schools creates the perception among teachers of pressing needs which must be addressed before the more developmental aspects of inclusive practice can be fostered.

SEN qualification as a factor influencing professional development needs

It was hypothesised that having a SEN qualification would affect the ranking teachers accorded to professional development. Hence, the data was analysed with reference to the teachers' SEN qualification. Initially, the combined primary/post-primary group was scrutinised using qualification as the independent variable. Table 3-47 presents the results of the ten areas ranked first with greatest frequency by those with and without a SEN qualification. Having a qualification can be seen to have influenced the relative importance attached to potential course components.

Table 3-47 Combined primary and post-primary – the top ten areas most frequently ranked first as a course component to be included in a professional development programme in SEN

	Area ranked as number 1 professional development need		EN ication	No Sl qualific		Total	
	professionar development need	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Types of learning difficulty	64	18.2	57	27.5	121	21.6
2	Assessment of learning difficulties	50	14.2	28	13.5	78	14.0
3	Teaching strategies	39	11.1	32	15.5	71	12.7
4	Developing an education plan	24	6.8	14	6.8	38	6.8
5	Language and literacy difficulties	25	7.1	10	4.8	35	6.3
6	School policy and planning	19	5.4	11	5.3	30	5.4
7	Developing an alternative curriculum	13	3.7	11	5.3	24	4.3
8	Psychological development in childhood	12	3.4	9	4.3	21	3.8
9	Psychological development in adolescence	15	4.3	3	1.4	18	3.2
10	Interpreting psychological assessments	14	4.0	3	1.4	17	3.0

Note: Missing values are excluded.

Types of learning difficulty, assessment of learning difficulty and teaching strategies were the most frequently first-ranked course components. Those without qualifications proportionately more frequently gave their top priority to types of learning difficulty and to teaching strategies.

Post-primary sector

To ascertain that the findings held for both primary and post-primary sectors, the results were further analysed with respect to each sector separately and again the sub-groups of with and without a qualification utilised. Post-primary responses are presented in Table 3-48. The picture portrayed here of the responses from 254 post primary teachers who included data on their qualifications and rankings on ideal course components is quite different for teachers with and without a qualification. Unfortunately, the numbers in the

two categories of this particular dataset are so disproportionate (232 with a qualification versus 22 without a qualification) that few inferences can be drawn from the data.

Table 3-48 Post-primary – The 10 areas most frequently ranked first as a course component to be included in a professional development programme in SEN

	Area ranked as number 1 professional development	SEN qualification			SEN ication	Total		
	need	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1	Types of learning difficulty	38	16.4	6	27.3	44	17.3	
2	Teaching strategies	29	12.5	4	18.2	33	13.0	
3	Assessment of learning difficulties	26	11.2	0	0.0	26	10.2	
4	Developing an education plan	20	8.6	0	0.0	20	7.9	
5	Psychological development in adolescence	14	6.0	3	13.6	17	6.7	
6	School policy and planning	14	6.0	3	13.6	17	6.7	
7	Language and literacy difficulties	12	5.2	0	0.0	12	4.7	
8	Inclusion in mainstream classes	11	4.7	0	0.0	11	4.3	
9	Psychological development in childhood	8	3.4	0	0.0	8	3.1	
10	Interpreting psychological assessments	8	3.4	0	0.0	8	3.1	
11- 26	Other areas (see Q2.4B)	≤7	-	≤1	-	∑=58	-	

Note: Missing values are excluded.

The most notable feature of this analysis was the stronger emphasis on different types of learning difficulty by teachers without a qualification, and on teaching strategies. While the disparity in importance was large for course components such as assessment, education plans and literacy, however, the small number of respondents without qualifications renders the comparisons between those with and without SEN qualifications in the post-primary sector difficult.

Primary sector

The response dataset from the 305 primary teachers who gave information on their qualifications and rankings on ideal course components differed from the post-primary dataset. In the primary cohort the number of teachers without a SEN qualification (185)

was greater than the number of teachers with a qualification (120). When the responses of these two sub-groups of primary teachers were compared some differences emerged. The course component areas most frequently ranked first by teachers with and without a SEN qualification offered scope for analysis (Table 3-49).

Table 3-49 The 10 areas most frequently ranked first as a course component to be included in a professional development programme in SEN

	Area ranked as number 1 professional development	SEN qualification			SEN ication	Total	
	need	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Types of learning difficulty	26	21.7	51	27.6	77	25.2
2	Assessment of learning difficulties	24	20.0	28	15.1	52	17.0
3	Teaching strategies	10	8.3	28	15.1	38	12.5
4	Language and literacy difficulties	13	10.8	10	5.4	23	7.5
5	Developing an education plan	4	3.3	14	7.6	18	5.9
6	Developing an alternative curriculum	7	5.8	10	5.4	17	5.6
7	Psychological development in childhood	4	3.3	9	4.9	13	4.3
8	School policy and planning	5	4.2	8	4.3	13	4.3
9	Interpreting psychological assessments	6	5.0	3	1.6	9	3.0
10	The law and SEN	5	4.2	3	1.6	8	2.6
11- 27	Other areas (see Q2.4B)	≤4-	-	≤1-	-	∑=38	

Note: Missing values are excluded.

Within the primary sector, the most highly ranked components were types of difficulty, assessment of difficulties and teaching strategies. The highest rank accorded by teachers to course components was not appreciably affected by having a qualification, although teachers without were proportionately somewhat more inclined to rank types of learning difficulty and teaching strategies as their first priority, (just as post-primary teachers

without SEN qualification had done). Of interest is that teachers with SEN qualification were relatively more interested in a course component on language and literacy than those without (10.8 per cent v 5.4 per cent). Teachers without a SEN qualification indicated greater need for a course component on developing an IEP (7.6 per cent v 3.3 per cent).

Overall, the most noteworthy inference to be drawn from this set of comparisons was that, at both levels, LS/R teachers without qualification were more likely to rank types of learning difficulty and teaching strategies as their highest priority. LS/R teachers without SEN qualification were less likely to rank literacy as an important element of a professional development programme in SEN.

3.4.4 Summary: LS/R teachers' professional development

This is divided into three sections: previous professional development; professional development sought; and implications of the findings for the professional development of teachers.

Previous professional development undertaken

- ♦ The high proportion of respondents who had undertaken SEN professional development is a positive feature of the findings.
- ♦ The fact that 12 per cent overall of LS/R teachers with substantial responsibilities for SEN in their schools had not engaged in any relevant in-career training is a matter for concern.
- Overall, 37 per cent of LS/R teachers had no certified qualification in special educational needs. This lack was statistically significantly greater at primary level.
- ♦ A number of factors affected whether LS/R teachers had a qualification or had participated in SEN in-service. These were:
 - o living in a rural setting (less likely to have a qualification);
 - o teaching in a disadvantaged school (more likely to have a qualification);
 - o teaching in a girls' school (more likely to have a qualification and more likely to have attended SEN in-service); and
 - o having actively chosen to work in SEN (more likely to have a qualification).

Professional development sought and recommendations for course content

Findings from this section are divided into two parts: professional development sought; and teacher suggestions for LS/R programme content.

Professional development sought

In the responses to an open question on professional development sought, a huge range of areas was mentioned giving rise to the impression that the breadth of the LS/R teacher's roles was unmanageable and indicating a need for clarification on the remit of the role at school level. In seeking professional development, among the responses was a high frequency of requests for general 'up-skilling' and unspecified 'courses'/'inservice'. Principals and teachers agreed on the most important professional development areas.

The main areas identified were:

- Professional development on individual education plans (IEPs) dominated the list.
- ♦ Knowledge of specific disabilities with dyslexia, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia and Asperger syndrome being the main areas of concern.
- ♦ Administrative skills.
- Testing diagnosis and assessment.
- ◆ Teaching methodologies relevant to SEN.
- ♦ Contact with experienced teachers.

Areas of particular importance for primary teachers were:

- ♦ Speech and language.
- Mathematics and literacy.

The areas particularly important for the post-primary sector were:

- Time management/organisation/co-ordination.
- ♦ Teaching strategies.
- ♦ Whole-school approaches.
- ♦ Policy/law.
- ♦ ESL.

When asked to identify school needs for professional development the areas most frequently singled out were those relating to particular disabilities:

- ♦ Mild general learning disability.
- ♦ Dyslexia.
- Behavioural problems.
- Emotional disturbance.

Very low priority was given to a number of areas including chronic illness, epilepsy, hearing impairment and severe-profound learning disability.

Teacher suggestions for course components in programmes for LS/R teachers

Primary and secondary sectors rated the following as their top five choices of course content:

- ◆ Types of learning difficulties.
- ♦ Teaching strategies.
- ♦ Language and literacy.
- ♦ Teaching mathematics.

There was a lesser degree of concurrence for the least important components of a programme with both sectors agreeing only three of the least important components – philosophy, presentation skills and conducting research.

The professional development course content areas were grouped into three areas pertaining to a student focus, a curriculum focus and a collaborative focus.

- ◆ Student-focused items (different types of learning difficulty and their characteristics, assessment of learning difficulties, interpreting psychological assessments, developing IEPs) were given a high level of importance by teachers.
- ◆ Curriculum-focused items (developing alternative curricula, teaching strategies and different subject areas) received the next level of importance.
- ♦ Collaborative items (developing skills of collaboration with other teachers, working with parents) received lesser importance rankings overall.

Given the emphasis on collaboration in the teachers' ideal conceptions of the LS/R role, it might have been expected that collaboration would be correspondingly reflected in their professional development priorities — especially in the case of the post-primary teachers who had valued collaboration highly in their ideal conception of the LS/R role. However, just one collaborative activity (school policy and planning) was in their top ten. in sixth place for primary and eighth place for post-primary teachers. Another contradiction arising is that courses on developing IEPs were highly sought but as an aspect of teachers' roles this was lower on the list of current and ideal tasks such as implementing and reviewing IEPs. This, perhaps, reflects the perceived urgency of the area at the time of the research.

Areas which dominated teachers' suggestions for professional development tended to reflect the immediacy of their needs.

- ♦ Courses which explore and critique the theory and practice of inclusion and special education, such as sociology and philosophy received low rankings.
- ♦ Conducting research into special education ranked only just above the critical reflective courses mentioned at the very bottom of the rankings.
- ♦ There was no evidence of a desire for professional development in leadership skills in the responses to the open-ended questions.

These are matters of concern particularly given the international acknowledgement of the importance of research/evidence-based teaching and the emphasis on creating a critical and reflective profession. Furthermore, ensuring a whole-school approach to the inclusion of students with special educational needs requires strong leadership to promote school-wide responsibility within the school community.

In short, the professional development requirements of teachers in special education were similar in the primary and post-primary educational sectors and were agreed on by LS/R teachers and principals.

- ♦ The research pointed to a wide variety of content in requests for professional development courses. This indicated that LS/R teachers' roles encompassed a substantial range of areas.
 - This can be interpreted as evidence of a need for 'role definition' to be taken seriously by schools, and the official Department of Education and Science guidelines on learning support and inclusion should be used to corral the remit of the LS/R teachers roles.
- The research pointed to a finding that the professional development requirements for SEN qualified and SEN unqualified teachers were strikingly similar suggesting a lack of self-confidence expressed by those teachers with SEN qualifications.
 - This can be interpreted as evidence of a need for professional development that promotes teacher resilience and promotes the concept of teachers as self-motivated professionals. The aim of courses should be to enhance capacity within the sector and provide sustainable professional development so that teachers are self-reliant.

3.4.5 Implications of findings for professional development of SL/R teachers

The similarity of the primary and post-primary teachers' perceptions of important components of a course is remarkable given the difference in the qualification levels of the two sectors. Most respondent post-primary teachers had a graduate diploma in special education or learning support, yet still felt in need of additional professional development in literacy, teaching strategies, assessment and mathematics. These were areas also highlighted by primary teachers, most of whom had no qualification in special education or learning support. This finding would appear to indicate the current professional development for special education needs does not promote teacher resilience. There may be far too great a reliance on training teachers to respond to specific dysfunctions — giving recipes for particular difficulties, and insufficient attention paid to developing teachers' capabilities in researching, implementing and

evaluating effective teaching and learning strategies for the diversity of students they will encounter over their teaching careers. The concept of sustainable professional development and teacher resilience is one which should underpin programmes (Day & Gu, 2007; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006) and this is particularly important in the challenging area of special education and inclusion. The agreement by primary and post-primary teachers that philosophy, sociology and research are the least important components of a course is of interest. It is noteworthy that in the literature on teacher professional development, these areas are considered crucial in contributing to the cultivation of a positive mindset towards inclusion. Time and again, the importance of attitude and mindset in developing inclusive schools is emphasised in the literature (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004; Loreman et al, 2005). The pre-eminent way that this can be achieved is through the study of sociology and philosophy of inclusive education. These areas of philosophy, sociology disciplines create the foundation from which teachers can evolve and develop as professionals. The other key area underrated by teachers is research. Yet, it is through researching their own practice that teachers can move beyond mere recipe application in their teaching, towards adopting the analytical and creative response to teaching and learning that is the hallmark of best practice (Timperley et al, 2007). The notion of the teacher as researcher is gaining prominence in the literature on teacher education (TTA, 1996) and growing in importance as the student population becomes increasingly diverse (Davis & Florian, 2004). Thus, the evidence points to the need for both the foundation disciplines of the philosophy and sociology of inclusion, and research skills to be incorporated in professional development programmes for teachers in special educational needs and inclusion.

4 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

Miles & Huberman, 1994: 21

This section outlines the procedures undertaken in the process of analysing the qualitative data for this research project.

4.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

4.1.1 Introduction

In this project, extensive data was generated through the research and, in line with the process of data reduction, decisions were made about participant groups to highlight. Qualitative data consisted of responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaires and transcripts of focus groups and interviews. The purpose of gathering the qualitative data was to contextualise the data emerging from the quantitative analysis and offer a range of perspectives on the current context of education for special educational needs. A key purpose was to paint a verbal picture of the lived experience of teachers' professional lives. Hence, in this section the qualitative data is not perceived as an instrument of triangulation for verifying the quantitative data but rather as offering perspectives on teachers' professional development and day-to-day work practices.

4.1.2 Source of qualitative data

The 38 texts which contribute to this research report emerged from the interactions with the main participant groups – teachers and stakeholders. Table 4-1 indicates the sources and quantity of data analysed here.

Table 4-1 Source of qualitative data

Text origin	Number of texts
Primary teacher interviews	8
Post-primary teacher interviews	14
Teacher focus groups	7
Subtotal (A)	(29)
Principal interviews (2)	2
Stakeholder interviews (7)	7
Subtotal (B)	(9)
Total	38

Using the methodology outlined in Chapter 2, these texts were deconstructed into a series of coded segments. Interviews varied in length and scope and these differences are evident in the proportional division of the coded segments. The main contributors to the qualitative data were teachers who account for 29 of the texts (76.3 per cent) and a

similar proportion of the coded segments (75.7 per cent). The finding that the coding of the teacher texts gave rise to a high ratio of coded segments was unexpected as during the interview and transcription process, the data from the stakeholders appeared richer and more extensive with fewer prompt from interviewers being recorded.

Table 4-2 illustrates a breakdown of the patterns of response. As demonstrated, overall, issues relating to teacher roles and challenges were commented on more frequently than those relating to the project's main focus – the professional development of teachers. This is due to the high number of comments on this topic in the teacher interviews. While it may be argued that this merely reflects the interview schedule and a possible bias of the interview process, nevertheless, it is an interesting finding. In contrast, comments from the teacher focus groups and from the stakeholder and principal interviews were evenly distributed between the two main categories.

4.1.3 Identifying themes

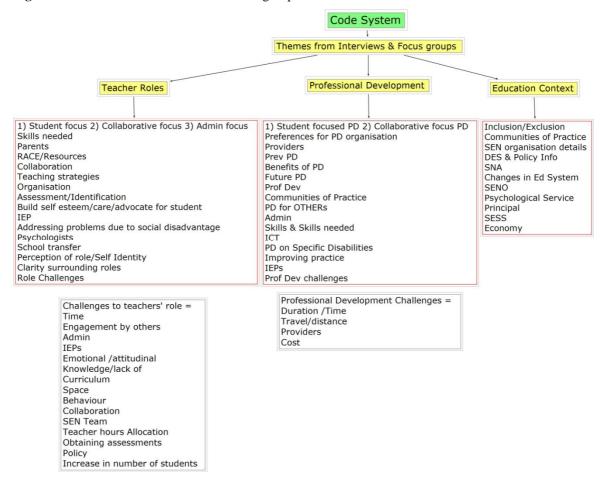
The initial coding process, as described in the methodology section, gave rise to over 1,000 coded text segments from the interviews and focus groups with a large range of codes being utilised. The codes, and associated texts of infrequently occurring codes, were examined and reclassified. In further rounds of analysis, these text segments were reviewed and commonalities identified which allowed further text reduction under themed headings. In a subsequent round of analysis, the texts were regrouped and classified under three themes (see Table 4-2). These themes relate to the project focus – teachers' roles and challenges – to teachers' professional development and to a third category – the education context – which included diverse concerns.

Table 4-2 Categories of coded segments

	Coded segments arising from										
Categories	Teacher interviews	Teacher focus groups	Teachers (total)	Principal interviews	Stakeholder interviews	Total					
Roles and challenges	307	147	(454)	63	66	583					
Professional development	144	149	(293)	43	69	405					
Education context	117	9	(126)	24	36	186					
Total	568	305	(873)	130	171	1174					

Two main categories of themes emerged from the analysis: those pertaining to the role of the teacher and those pertaining to the professional development of the teacher. Within both categories, significant subcategories emerged. A third category combined areas that pertained to the broader education context. These three categories can be represented graphically (Figure 4.1) as an economical means of reducing qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Figure 4.1 Themes from interviews and focus groups



Themes can occur in more than one category, such as IEP in both 'Roles and functions' and in 'Professional development'. This reflects the meaning of the comment rather than the words used.

Code grouping and thematic classification enabled issues shared by several respondents to emerge. As noted by Silverman 'quantitative measures such as counting instances of particular interactions or codes can aid validity in qualitative research' (2004: 181). Indeed, this procedure strengthened the analytic process as it permitted constant

comparisons of the number of codes drawn from each group in support of a particular theme. Through this process, it was possible to determine precisely how frequently a theme arose and who uttered it. This avoided over-representation of a particular group or a particular viewpoint and also prevented researcher bias emerging. Currently, 71 different codes are in use which can be collapsed or expanded depending on the breadth of focus and depth of analysis required.

The following section on findings from the qualitative analysis deals with the major themes and sub-themes emerging as determined by the frequency of the occurrences.

4.2 Findings from the Qualitative Data Analysis

This chapter concentrates on the qualitative data emerging from the teacher focus groups and interviews. Principals' and other stakeholders' interviews are discussed later. Crucially, views expressed are those of a self-selected sub-group of the original sample. In the main, the teachers electing to be interviewed were confident and experienced. As the main focus of the research was exploring professional development for teachers, the first priority was to engage with a wide geographical spread and the second priority was to ensure that primary and post-primary teachers were included. The qualitative data is discussed under three main themes: roles and responsibilities; professional development; and education context. This sequence mirrors the frequency hierarchy that emerged during the qualitative data analysis. During the interviews and focus groups, by far the greatest number of comments from teachers concerned their roles and responsibilities.

4.3 Theme One: LS/R Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

The qualitative data relating to roles and responsibilities that emerged from the teacher interviews and focus groups suggest the tasks of LS/R teachers are wide-ranging and numerous. The following extract from one interview provides a typical example:

Ok, well obviously my very first one is, as a teacher to the students who are there. And another one would be, the planning and preparation and evaluation of work, both on my own personal planning, and planning with other teachers. Advice to other teachers. Sourcing resources. Team

teaching. Individual withdrawal, withdrawal of individual students [sic]. Small group work with the students. Planning programmes. Setting up IEPs. Setting up IPLPs [Individual profile & learning plans]. Liaising with parents. Liaising with the management of the school. Looking at other outside agencies and agencies within the school, that we have, that can be used and the students can be referred through, and that would be the likes of guidance counselling, refer to Child and Family Services, psychological services, and stuff like that. Managing resources within the school itself as well. This is a big, big list! ... Applying to the NCSE for resources. Meeting with the SENOs. Now, let me think! Because there are more. Timetabling of course. Passing on information about reasonable accommodations ... somebody else will do the paperwork, but I will go around and get the information, and make the recommendations. Testing, or I shouldn't have said 'testing', assessments of first year when they come into the school, dividing up the classes as well. Then there will also be teachers coming back to me, where they've identified that maybe a student isn't getting on so well, and making recommendations on to the management of the school, for whether the student should be further tested, and whether they need to move class. Then in testing of individual students as well, so that would be the Neale Analysis, and that sort of stuff. I think that might be it!

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT8: 77–92

This diversity of roles applies equally to primary and post-primary teachers and indeed appears to be the shared experience internationally of such support roles in schools (Cole, 2005; Szwed, 2007a; Forlin, 2001). In describing and interpreting the qualitative data on roles and responsibilities, four sub-themes emerged: comments on roles focusing on the student; comments focusing on collaborative aspects of the role; comments that pertained to administrative responsibilities, and finally the challenges underlying the various roles and responsibilities emerged as a supplementary theme. In the following sections, comments associated with these four are presented and explored.

4.3.1 LS/R roles: student focus

Most participants, primary and post-primary, in interviews and focus groups, perceived themselves first and foremost as teachers supporting the learning needs of students and preparing them for the next stage of their lives.

My main roles and responsibilities? I suppose to support children in their learning where they qualify for a learning support/resource.

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 66

To ensure that the children's special educational needs are catered for to the best, the best possible advantage. Again, so they can face secondary school and life generally... It's to equip them with the best we possibly can, you know, educationally and life skills.

Interview, primary teacher, PT2: 46

I'd say, you know, like, open any of those books, and there's a list a mile long of the roles and responsibilities of the learning support teacher, and you know, I think, you know, genuinely learning support teachers are, you know, to a greater or lesser extent, trying to achieve all of those things, there's so many different aspects to the job, but to me the most important one is the actual, you know, developing some sort of an education, that the child will walk away from school having achieved their potential, basically.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT4: 260

This focus on the progress of each individual student who has been identified as having special educational needs is a characteristic of the traditional role of the LS/R teacher. However, the recognition that meeting individual needs must also take place within the wider school community context has led to a greater appreciation of the role of the class and subject teacher in the education of all children (DES, 2007). Responsibility for the progress of all students, including those identified as having special educational needs, rests primarily with the class and subject teacher (Government of Ireland, 1998) and not with the LS/R teacher. Class teachers may believe they do not have the specialised skills

to teach a diverse range of students and LS/R SEN teachers may find that in addition to supporting the student, they have a supplementary role in supporting their colleagues and collaborating with them to ensure students have the best possible educational experience.

4.3.2 LS/R roles: collaborative focus

The second most cited role in the qualitative data was that of collaborating with colleagues. Teachers indicated a variety of ways through which they supported coworkers in teaching students with special educational needs.

Yeah, I would play an advisory role as well with teachers who are, em, having problems with children either learning support or behaviour. Em, and then perhaps also to put, em, particular topics, say in maths. I'm going to do Time with second class, a particularly difficult topic for that age group, little things like that would crop up during the year.

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 68

I think that in some schools there is the real end for the learning support teacher to be used in a team teaching context and that's the best use of the learning support teacher.

Interview, primary teacher, PT5: 68

... now the bulk of my timetable would be obviously with the students, but I would be the focus point for what resources they [teachers] need, what strategies they could employ, any courses that they'd like to go on, answering questions about maybe the students' needs, directing their needs, getting up the IEPs and stuff like that, that would be my main responsibility.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT8: 8–10

In this instance, the potential for a collaborative role to be further expanded to

incorporate a professional development aspect was proffered.

I would love to come in to classrooms with new members of staff, who

haven't been in this school before, are only new in the school, and equip

them with the skills that they need to, and work with them, to

accommodate the students with special needs in the school.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT8: 192

This role of the LS/R teacher as an in-house staff educator is one espoused in other

jurisdictions (Abbott, 2007) and proposed as a role for teachers in the Irish context

(DES, 2007). The notion that a teacher with a particular expertise would share the

knowledge among colleagues is gaining momentum and will be discussed further in

tandem with the concept of developing communities of practice.

4.3.3 LS/R roles: administrative focus

The teacher's role as an administrator is generally perceived negatively. The

incremental nature of the administrative burden was alluded to and its growing

importance in proportion to other aspects of the role.

... like, I started doing this work in 2001, and the amount of paperwork

has grown and grown and grown, you know, but it hasn't allowed for the

fact that the person that started off first of all doing this kind of work,

when there was only a couple of students maybe in the school, now we

have 21 in the school, they're doing all the paperwork.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT9: 201

And organising your own work, as well, a lot of planning, record-

keeping and research, you know.

Focus group, primary teachers, GPT1: 6-8

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The tendency for the administrative aspects to dominate was one many teachers were acutely aware of and the fact that it took teachers away from the student support role which they primarily identified with, was commented on by several teachers.

Yes, like I'm there, I'm a teacher, that's what I am, I'm not an administrator! ... the way everything is going, I think they [the DES] think paperwork is becoming so more important, to everybody, than the teaching, and I think that's really, really sad ... because I know, I only took over the role of the co-ordinator this year, and I find I'm not teaching as much.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PP6: 203–208

I just feel the actual paperwork and administration and all the filing and all that is taking up too much time. And actually cutting into the time I have to work with students. And I'd love to get rid of that.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT7: 106

I would feel that for resource teachers, the amount of paperwork [is overwhelming]. Between planning and [individual] plans ... the paperwork takes away from the teaching time.

Focus group, primary teacher, BPT2: 3

Both primary and post-primary teachers found the administrative tasks onerous. The tasks were considered necessary, however, and the problem was perceived simply as a question of having more time to devote to administration. A requirement for further research in this area emerged from this analysis. It could include an examination of necessary tasks and who needs to discharge them. The possibility of administrative tasks devolving to other staff could also be explored and whether the LS/R teacher could then focus on other aspects of the role where their training and skills might be optimised.

Sub-Theme: Challenges Experienced in Executing the LS/R Role

Given the number and breadth of functions that are part of the LS/R role, the sense of

being overwhelmed by work that permeates many discussions is understandable.

... because the workload is increasing year on year on year, and people

are now getting to the stage of desperation where they feel we have to

shout about it because things are not getting any better.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PP11: 163

When analysed, these concerns can be divided into those that pertain: to students; to

collaboration; and to administrative issues.

Challenges relating to the student focus of the role

A major challenge – driven, it would seem, by a deficit approach to SEN – was for

teachers to be able to identify students' difficulties and to devise appropriate

programmes to assist students in their learning.

... awareness of the children's difficulties is the main one and to be able

to address them exactly, identify what the difficulties are and address

them as best you can.

Interview, primary teacher, PT2: 50

The LS/R teacher's desire to support each student who presents with additional

educational needs is cited. The sense that this support should take the form of individual

contact or group withdrawal leads to challenges to accommodate them all.

Pupils that would be entitled to some form of resource there we can't get

those hours sanctioned.

Interview, primary-teacher, PT3: 88

But that's my greatest challenge. I've so many children that need help.

Not necessarily below the 10 per cent but who would be a bit above that

but given the time would make far more progress with a child under 10

per cent who would have a whole load of intervention. And I find that

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extremely frustrating And I take them and ... completely bung up my

timetable, at least I feel I'm giving them some time, so that is my biggest

challenge - that I find I can't take as many people as I'd like to take.

Because there's a cut-off point, you know, that's way too low.

Focus group, primary & post-primary, DPPT&PT2: 13

Confusion was evident on where the boundaries of the teachers' role lay and to what

extent there were responsible for the learning needs of all students. This was

accompanied by a sense of guilt at being unable to help all students in need of additional

teaching

Challenges relating to the collaborative aspects of the role

In one focus group, teachers agreed they needed more time for collaborative work but

felt guilty when tasks other than teaching took them away from direct student contact.

Time as regards meeting parents and time for the pupils. Time for

organising ... And then not having enough time to meet the mainstream

teachers, the lack of time ... You know, what if you were to meet with the

teachers you get so much more [than] to bring back with you for your

work.

Focus group, primary teachers, GPT1: 245-249

We shouldn't be feeling guilty when we do that [meeting with parents or

with teachers], usually you think this is the time you should be spending

with the children. But, you know, that's just as important.

Focus group, primary teachers, GPT1:45-249

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While liaising with others is a legitimate role, the LS/R teachers said they felt ill at ease and open to censure from colleagues if they had no students in their classroom even though they might be doing SEN-related work. Furthermore, not all colleagues were at ease with aspects of collaborative practices.

Some people, they resent the interruption and, yes, do not want in-class support. And then, eh, other people are just hugely open to anything that will help the child in their class with their learning, you know?

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 100

While in the main the relationship with colleagues was positive, LS/R teachers were overwhelmed at times by the expectations others had of their role.

But I suppose some people do think you have a magic wand, yeah, and you're going to bring up their Micra-T and Sigma-T results by the end of the year and if you haven't, why haven't you? [laughs] But, em, that's the more unusual.

Interview, Primary teacher, PT1:100

They feel that any problem that arises with a student basically you have to fix it and not necessarily themselves. And you know like you should be differentiating their curriculum for them, in science say, for example, you should be doing the worksheets for them, you know?

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT1: 58

The shared responsibility for students with SEN was perceived as a necessary progression linked to the status of the role by one teacher.

So I think if the status of the post was raised on a professional level sort of within the school, I think it might just open people's eyes to the fact, no it's not just one corner of the school or whatever, this is everybody's responsibility, this is a major, major issue for an awful lot of students that come to our school, everybody needs to be involved.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT11: 157

Challenges relating to the administrative aspects of role

The desire for more time was a recurrent theme throughout discussions. Chiefly, this need for more time applied to the administrative aspects of the LS/R role.

The only thing I'd want to change is the paperwork involved in it! Like, the running of the department is fine, you're just not given enough time to do the paperwork. Like, you're there maybe in the evening time trying to get stuff done, you know? By the time you've applied for hours, reasonable accommodations, sent back hours, do the timetable when you go back to school, it's just very difficult to get everything, you never seem to be on top of it and it's just time is needed to get on top of it.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PP6: 146–152

A further issue for a teacher was a questioning of the efficacy of their undertakings. Another teacher was concerned about whether the actions taken were the best possible use of scarce resources.

Well I suppose the whole management area, because it's kind of been thrust on me, managing resource teachers, and drawing up timetables, and it's just worrying that maybe I'm [not] getting the best value for money from the way I'm doing it.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT2: 49

Another teacher found the administrative duties associated with planning for students with additional needs were so considerable these tasks should form the basis of an administrative post of responsibility in the school.

I think there is a big need for the co-ordinating of this area to be a full time job... I am just run off my feet, you know? With, my principal could come to me ... and say, 'There is a new pupil coming in, we need to apply for resource hours for her', then you have to get on to the family, you have to get on to get them to come in, you have to get them to fill in

the forms, sign them, and the whole lot, and process the whole thing, and send it off and ... I'm teaching 28 classes, 29 classes and doing all that co-ordination ... you're trying to make half of yourself, that there is so much paperwork, and so much liaising, and so much, you know, contacting of people and whatever, involved in this area, that there is a need in, I think, in a school where there is a certain number of resource pupils, for it to be a full-time co-ordinating job ... because, again, there is so much paperwork really that it's a, it needs that really to do it properly.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT9: 203

The roles and responsibilities of the LS/R/SEN teachers and the challenges associated with carrying out these tasks formed a large part of the discussion and dialogue in the interviews and focus groups. Teachers were concerned about the supports available to students with special educational needs within the current structures.

... parents are sending their children to school with the expectations that their needs are going to be cared for and the fact is we're struggling to do it.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT11: 163

These comments from LS/R teachers give an insight into the day-to-day experiences of teachers and the challenges they face in executing their role. The role appears multifaceted and evidence shows a lack of clarity surrounding its parameters which is a cause of concern. This finding is discussed in later sections.

4.4 Theme Two: Professional Development

The second most frequently coded theme was professional development. The guidelines that describe the inclusion of students with SEN, outline additional tasks that differ from those of a mainstream class teachers. This suggests that supplementary professional development is necessary before undertaking the LS/R-SEN role but such preappointment of additional professional development is not compulsory.

You're a mainstream teacher on Monday and when you take up resource or whatever you take up, the next day you're labelled resource teacher and you're automatically expected to know how to deal with everybody.

Focus group, primary teachers, GPT2: 168

In ideal circumstances, teachers felt that along with an initial SEN-related qualification, there was a need for continued professional development and proposed that:

Every five or three years that you do a top-up, a week, you get a week from work to go into your nearest college and you do a top-up course. Because every five years, like, things change ... you are a bit jaded with what you already know.

Focus group, primary and post-primary mixed, DPPT&PT2: 57

4.4.1 Professional development content

Given the lack of clarity surrounding the limits of the LS/R teacher's role, evidence suggests that professional development courses should include the opportunity to explore the Department of Education and Science guidelines in full. These assist teachers in defining their role.

I wrote up my own guidelines prior to the guidelines coming out ... But I think the guidelines are the best thing that ever came out; because you can say there you go, look. And you can say this is it.

Focus group, primary and post-primary mixed, DPPT&PT2: 16–17

A similar assertion that the guidelines were invaluable in clarifying the boundaries of

LS/R teachers' responsibilities was made in an interview setting.

I think that [the guidelines] kind of clarified roles and have taken a bit

away from the resource and learning support teacher in that other

people are beginning to realise they have a responsibility. And when it

comes to, you know, giving time on it and allocating resources that they

are aware of responsibilities. So that's a good thing.

Interview, primary teacher, PT7: 148

Another teacher found the guidelines useful in discussing role parameters with

colleagues.

When they [teachers] are looking for something that I can't deliver and I

have to say, 'We'll look in the guidelines', and say, 'Look my caseload is

made up of X, Y and Z rather than what you want.

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 104

The realisation that these guidelines answered some questions on the nature of the

LS/R-SEN role became apparent during the course of one interview.

I have never received anything that outlines the specific roles and

responsibilities of a learning support teacher. I know that they are

outlined, the learning support guidelines do outline, em, they're quite

good on what is kind of expected from a learning support point of view

and what we need to do and assessments and diagnosis and intervention

and that kind of thing and that's one place probably now that I think of

it.

Interview, primary teacher, PT3: 124

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Where teachers are familiar with policy and legislation, the concept of what a whole-school approach to inclusion entails is clarified.

What I would love to see happen, is more, a whole-school approach to special needs, given that the EPSEN Act puts the responsibility back to teachers, and that teachers are made more aware of their responsibilities to special needs.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT4: 16

It would appear that a key aspect of a professional development course in SEN should be a discussion of the nature of the role of the LS/R-SEN teacher in the context of current education policy and legislation for special education.

4.4.2 Professional development: individual student focus

The development of individual education plans (IEPs) was another area that caused concern to teachers and was considered important enough to include in a course of professional development. There appeared to be confusion about the plans' nature and purpose with teachers taking an idiosyncratic approach.

Yes, and I think, you know, a big area that is prevalent at the moment is the area of IEPs and IPLPs. You know, and depending on the school, they can very often be the responsibility of the learning support teacher on their own, with the class teacher having very little input. Or in other schools, it's the class teacher, you know, so I think that whole area needs to be addressed as to who is responsible for the IEPs for the child. And made very clear.

Interview, primary teacher, PT5: 78

Yeah, they will be constantly sending down different ideas as to how you might set this thing up and little templates and things but everybody's really just going at it their own way – nobody really knows whether they have it right or not or indeed if there is a right way.

Interview, primary teacher, PT8: 126

But if there was one thing I could change, in terms of my role, it would be that I would have much more freedom and flexibility to get the IEPs exactly, and the IPLPs, exactly the way I wanted them. Well I suppose, it would be less stressful for me, if I had the time to work on those IEPs in the way that I wanted to, and that we were able to get the co-operation of all of the staff, because of the union thing, we can't, so that's, we just have to let that go by the by.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PP8:190, 194

Another aspect necessary in a professional development course was knowledge of appropriate programmes for individual student needs.

... you don't get a huge amount of support from the special services ... It's hard to get a model of what 'doing fine' really should be and where you're taking the child next ... and you could access lots of ideas on how to bring out the best in the child – just that you're teaching him properly.

Focus group, primary teachers, BPT2: 11

4.4.3 Professional development: collaborative focus

A theme running throughout the interviews and focus groups was the desire for professional development in devising collaborative approaches to special education. This was expressed in a focus group and agreed by all participants.

I think that we could have, at least two approaches to it [professional development] which might help. One would be to train us as teachers [of students and] as team developers. You know that we are not just teachers. If we're working with a team of teachers and if we could be helped to train us to be able to facilitate our colleagues.

Focus group, primary and post-primary mixed, DPPT&PT1: 97

The theme of requiring professional development to assist promoting more collaborative practices was also expressed in interviews.

Probably more development in ... in team teaching, and I suppose in perhaps in how to get it off the ground within a school ... How to get team teaching, yeah, or collaborative teaching, yeah, there is a certain amount of resistance and none of us have enough experience perhaps to get over that or it's very difficult to get over that because I'm not perhaps confident enough in what I am doing to pass that on to the class teacher, you know, particularly the experienced classed teachers. You have to really be able to sell something, to promote a change.

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 26-28

In addition to assistance with developing their skills in collaboration, teachers wanted the whole-school community to have the opportunity to participate in SEN-related professional development.

[Professional development] is a thing that management has to look at, and has to maybe organise on a whole-staff level. I can go off and I can do my course maybe, as I said, at a weekend or whatever, you know, but ... there needs to be more whole-school development, or in-service and that, and training, you know.

Interview, primary teacher, PT9: 191

I think I would very definitely like to see in-school development, as a whole staff, you know, help teachers to become more comfortable with the idea that they actually are teaching them [students with SEN] ... they actually are doing the work, you know, but maybe help them to develop their skills.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT4: 22–26

Perhaps the two elements should be seen to work in tandem. If the LS/R-SEN teachers had the skills to facilitate in-school professional development in SEN and to initiate collaborative approaches to teaching, then this could be reinforced by whole-school

professional development from external sources. Middle-management skills are called for to undertake this additional role. One teacher understood this need for management skills to perform effectively in the LS/R-SEN role.

Because of the kinds of things that come up, within the special needs department, just to be clued in what I should be doing ... I've been doing kind of more of the middle-management courses ... kind of just middle management and team leading ... I found most of them useful for a few different things, like there would be bits that wouldn't be so appropriate, I suppose.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT13: 326–336

The Department of Education and Science primary and post-primary guidelines (DES, 2000, 2007) describe roles for the LS/R teacher that go beyond the individual student focus. This re-conceptualisation of the role includes staff development and staff management. This broadening requires the incorporation of a staff development facet in professional learning programmes. The increasing managerial demands also require a reorientation of the professional development programmes to provide for managerial skills development.

4.5 Theme Three: The Context of Inclusive/Special Education

Subsidiary themes on the school community emerged during the interviews and focus groups. This section focuses solely on the theme of support for special education in the mainstream school.

A bleak scenario was depicted in one post-primary school.

I will say that there are people who are working within the school who think that these children shouldn't be in the school at all. They think that they should be in special schools, and, you know, they wouldn't value the fact that these children are in the school, and that they are entitled to their education, and that they must accommodate them within their rooms, and this is something that they have a legal entitlement to, and

that is a big barrier. And those people in general do not want you in their classroom, they don't want your advice, and they will stay well away from you, you know. And that is a few, I'm talking about, less than a handful of people, do you know what I mean? It's two or three people, but in a meeting, that can create a barrier, that can create kind of a friction there.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT8: 176

In general, however, there is a growing awareness that including students with SEN is not a temporary phenomenon.

Ahm, I think that has taken a while, I think it has taken a while for teachers who have been there a long time to realise that these kids are here to stay, you know.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT2: 209

A supportive principal was perceived as the quintessential factor in promoting inclusive education in the school.

I think that really the principal has to take you know a key responsibility for it because they are the primary, you know, the leading educator within the school.

Interview, primary teacher, PT5: 48

I think it's hugely... an awful lot depends on the principal and how up to date they keep with guidelines, department guidelines or, eh, circulars or, em, how willing they are to hear what has been gained at a course and that kind of thing, you know.

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 108

This significant role of the principal gained added importance at post-primary level.

The commitment of the principal is number one, I think if you have that, then the rest of the staff will follow, you know, because the leadership is

there ... I know that myself from experience, you know, that I'd say that, in about 14 years, I had a principal who was lovely, but just let me get on with things, you know, that way? And then there was somebody who really didn't understand special needs, and now there's somebody who is really committed, and it's just, it's just made a huge difference and they put, I suppose they are committing, you know they are committing a lot of time by giving that post.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT2: 194–205

Where the principal is considered an advocate for students with SEN, the LS/R teacher was more positive about their role. In contrast, in a school where the principal was supportive but not proactive, the LS/R teacher had a more difficult task in foregrounding special education.

Principals have to try and look at the overall staffing, and our school is over quota and whatever, for me to be saying, 'Look you know we need to have people who are going to continue on resource next year', and the principal will say, 'Well, I have to put in my mainstream classes first, and then see', you know, so the special needs often gets put to one side until everything else is catered for ... but, again like, I have suggested at times that we get people to come and talk, but again, you know, often times they'll, you know, say management might feel, 'Well there are other areas that we need to look at first ... if we're going to get someone in to give a talk or whatever, well there's other areas that we have to kind of prioritise.'

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT9: 159–161, 186

In one instance, it emerged that the value and respect accorded to the LS/R teacher was contingent on the overall place of SEN within the school.

I know some people don't even have a room to work out of. Some people don't have books, they haven't been told that there is a budget, they haven't been told that there is finance given ... and it was only through discussion on the courses and follow-up discussions that we would have

with people, that we realised how good we had it ... We know that we're valued and that we're respected but some people were maybe shunted into rooms that hadn't been painted for years, that had been store rooms and stuff like that.

Interview, primary-teacher, PT6: 275–281

Having the support of the principal enabled one teacher to undertake a more collaborative role within the school.

The principal said he's going to take a release day ... and he's going to take the classes for me to meet the teachers for a full day.

Focus group, primary teachers, GPT1: 27

One can imagine that if the principal is facilitating meetings between the class and LS/R teacher, these meetings will be taken more seriously than if held at snatched moments during break.

Such examples of principals' actions underlined their role as a prime factor in determining the place of special needs in the school. Teachers were categorical on the necessity for a pro-inclusion principal in defining the school's ethos and the position of SEN within it.

4.6 Conclusion

The presence or absence of topics in qualitative data reveals much about the concerns of the research participants. In the interview and focus groups with LS/R teachers, some pertinent topics were infrequently mentioned. Of particular interest were the few occurrences of comments relating to special needs assistants (SNAs). The appointment of SNAs is a key strategy of the Department of Education and Science in its support for students with SEN. In 2006, 8,200 SNAs were provided to schools (DES, 2006: 20). In speaking about their roles and responsibilities, few teachers mentioned working with an SNA as being part of their remit or reported that formal management structures were in place to provide guidance to SNAs on their role. Quantitative data corroborated this

situation where liaison with the SNA received a low level of importance (0). The SNA's position within the school structure is worthy of further investigation.

In this review of the qualitative data results, several themes are clearly dominant: an increasing workload being devolved to the LS/R teacher; the perceived lack of clarity surrounding the parameters of the role, by teachers and their colleagues; the need for the whole-school to engage in teaching students with SEN through collaborative practices and professional development in the area; the increasingly managerial role of the LS/R teacher; and the central role the principal plays in embracing inclusive practices in the school. Implications emanate from these findings for the course content of professional development programmes for LS/R teachers. One is to ensure that information relating to legislation, policy and the Department of Education and Science guidelines on roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers is made known and acted on by teachers and schools. A second implication is to provide professional development that includes the basic skill areas – literacy, mathematics, social skills, assessment – but goes beyond the individual student focus to incorporate a wider range of areas relating to inclusive teaching practices and learning for all students. A third implication of the findings is the need to emphasise the commonalities of learning challenges alongside the aetiology and associated pedagogy of specific disabilities. A fourth implication is the development of collaborative and managerial skills so that LS/R teachers can be proactive in promoting a school-wide approach to include students with SEN in mainstream schools Finally, an overarching implication of the findings is that these course elements should be contextualised in the philosophy and sociology of equality and social justice to equip LS/R teachers with the foundations to base their promotion of a socially just and inclusive society to their colleagues.

5 Discussion

Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of the research under three main headings: the context of the school community; the roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers; and the professional development sought by LS/R teachers.

5.1 Introduction

The move towards inclusion in Ireland is signalled by the increasing numbers of students with SEN and their teachers in mainstream schools as reported in section one of the findings. The substantive nature of that educational experience in schools, however, is now being addressed: '... the debate is no longer about whether everybody should receive a high-quality education but about the factors that get in the way of this and how to ensure that it does happen' (Hegarty, 2007: 528). This investigation into LS/R teachers' professional development requirements is part of that process of ensuring that students with special educational needs receive a high-quality education provided by class teachers supported by appropriately qualified LS/R teachers in an inclusive setting. In this section, we review some key findings of the quantitative and qualitative data and consider their implications in the light of international research and of comments made by a range of teachers, principals, parents and stakeholders (personnel from higher education institutions, the Department of Education and Science and support organisations) during focus groups and interviews which formed the qualitative dimension of the research. These implications give rise to the recommendations summarised in Chapter 6.

The discussion is divided into three sections which mirror the presentation of the results in the previous chapters: school characteristics; roles and responsibilities; and professional development for LS/R teachers.

5.2 School Community Characteristics

A concern arising from findings in section one is the disproportionate number of students with SEN in disadvantaged schools. This may point to systemic factors which are difficult to eradicate. Indeed, the OECD acknowledged that the largest source of variation in student learning is attributable, not to teachers, but to differences such as abilities, attitudes, and family and community background (OECD, 2005). The promotion of inclusive education in Ireland is particularly difficult due in part to the traditionally segregationist education system based on religious and class divides.

The schools ... are influenced systemically, and those systemic influences are strongly segregationist. So that's the systemic influence, and ... you're always going to get resistance, you're going to get no paradigm shift in Irish education because the socially capitalised classes benefit from having it the way it is. And they're going to maintain it the way it is ... and whatever changes, legislative changes, are made, the system will be reinvented to maintain that balance in different ways.

Interview, stakeholder, S6: 119

In Ireland, education, particularly at second level, is particularly non-inclusive. While aspiration and policy may overtly be inclusive, the reality is that schools exercise exclusionary practices and students with special needs are directed to selected schools (DES, 2007a). Research on the Irish education system has pointed to the dominance of meritocratic and essentialist thinking among educationalists. This implies that only a relative minority of people are gifted in society and that these must be selected and rewarded for society to prosper (Drudy & Lynch, 1993). The research evidence also suggests that Irish schools are remarkably similar in the structure of their power relations and in the nature of their pedagogical practice to what they were in the nineteenth century (Lynch, 1999: 303). Equality and effective inclusion, whether for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, or for other marginalised groups, will demand very significant changes in school cultures and in pedagogical practices and this is clear from our research. For example, within post-primary schools, the need for a coherent, purposeful approach to SEN was underlined by some questionable practices that are in operation.

I think what some of the schools have done is they've allocated the resource hours to lots of different members of staff, about 12 or 15 teachers involved, doing a couple of hours each. And they were all doing it, so what the individuals were doing was going off for an extra maths lesson, an extra geography lesson here, there was nobody who was really looking at what the needs were or any kind of overall plan for you know working out a programme. It was all a bit hit and miss.

Interview, stakeholder, S3: 24

This tendency to spread the SEN teacher allocation very thinly among teachers at postprimary level was noted in the quantitative data (see Chapter 3) and in other Irish research (O'Conluain, 2007). Other practices noted in the research were the setting up of informal 'special classes' where students experiencing a wide range of barriers to learning were placed together.

The importance of planning and of a whole-school approach has been well established in research and has been incorporated in Irish government policy. The Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998) sets out the following legislative position in relation to school plans (Section 21 [1–4]):

- **21.**—(1) A board shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, make arrangements for the preparation of a plan (in this section referred to as the 'school plan') and shall ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and updated.
- (2) The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including equality of access to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs.

- (3) The school plan shall be prepared in accordance with such directions, including directions relating to consultation with the parents, the patron, staff and students of the school, as may be given from time to time by the Minister in relation to school plans.
- (4) A board shall make arrangements for the circulation of copies of the school plan to the patron, parents, teachers and other staff of the school.

It is, therefore, a matter of concern that while 86 per cent of respondent teachers reported a school policy on special educational needs, only 50 per cent (60 per cent at primary and just 40 per cent at post-primary) said there was a written plan in their school for the organisation of special educational needs. It is clear from the legislation that school plans should relate to students with disabilities and special educational needs, be written and be circulated to the whole-school community with the intention that it becomes part of the school's conceptual ethos. Should it even be the case that schools had a written plan but that respondents were unaware of it, it would still be problematic.

A further issue of concern in this study is schools' uneven access to the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS). Just 80 per cent reported access to NEPS. As pointed out by Griffin and Shevlin (2007: 66), the NEPS has a critical role as providing support to schools in special education provision and as 'gatekeepers' of resources. While the position evident in the present study is an improvement on the position in the school year 2003-04 when just 60 per cent of (primary) schools reported access to NEPS (ibid), there remains a major outstanding challenge to the system to enable the service to be available to all schools, without becoming overstretched.

5.3 LS/R Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities

A review of the Department of Education and Science policy documents and guidelines suggests that the roles of class teachers and LS/R teachers differ in Ireland (DES, 2000, 2007). This relates to areas of collaboration, consultancy targeted teaching and includes several aspects such as whole-school planning for SEN, assessment, the IEP process, liaison and transfer responsibilities (DES, 2007). Therefore, a move from a mainstream

teaching post to special education will entail a new role for the LS/R teacher. All the facets of the role described (collaboration, consultancy targeted teaching, whole-school planning, assessment and the IEP process) must be reflected in the professional development education courses for LS/R teachers.

Currently, both sectors have learning support/'special education teacher' posts dependent on school enrolment and have further additional teaching hours allocated in cases of assessed educational needs (with differing criteria for allocation of such posts at primary and post-primary levels). Amalgamation of the two previously separate learning support and resource teaching roles at primary level is significant and removed an 'unnecessary distinction' between support teachers (Travers, 2006). It is hoped that this fusion of roles will herald a move towards a more collaborative model of support. This will enable a broader understanding of the role to include 'supporting class teachers as well as teaching individual children' (ibid: 165).

In this research, questionnaire responses offered an insight into the varied roles and responsibilities of SEN teachers in primary and post-primary mainstream schools in Ireland at the onset of inclusive education. The conceptualisations of the LS/R teachers of their current roles and their ideal roles laid heavy emphasis on student-focused items, such as developing, reviewing and implementing IEPs, and monitoring student progress. There was little evidence of a strong collaborative role emerging, however, though there was a sense in which teachers were aware that their roles were changing, particularly as their top priorities varied when considering what the LS/R role should be in an ideal situation.

5.3.1 Changed role

Interview data supported these findings on changing roles. Teachers said their role had altered in recent years and they reflected on the incremental responsibilities in the learning support/resource teachers' role:

I started off with the title of learning support and then somehow or other resource is tagged onto me and now I'm moving into being the special educational needs organiser.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT7: 14

... and then it has gone from one teacher being a remedial teacher to now resource hours, and managing a department, and managing other teachers, and getting them involved.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PP2: 77

Many teachers reported this experience of a gradual expansion in role. Given the figures that emerged from the data, this expanding role appears to have been accompanied by a large increase in students coming within the remit of the LS/R teachers. Concerns have been expressed about the efficacy of the role in this regard. A combined post-primary managerial body described learning support as being 'overburdened to the extent of being ineffective' (ACCS, 2008: 121). This experience of a rise in students with SEN occurred in other countries. In an international comparison of the roles of SEN teachers, Emanuelsson (2001) posits that more students being identified with special needs is symptomatic of the appointment of a SEN expert to a school and suggests that this 'multiplier effect' works to the system's advantage. It may be in a school's interest to have more students identified with SEN who are then allocated additional resource hours which permits the exclusion of problematic students from mainstream classes. These students then become the sole responsibility of the LS/R teacher and the class teacher is absolved from responsibility. Emanuelsson also cautions against the 'export' of students with SEN to the care of the LS/R teacher being viewed as the sole method of supporting students with special needs. Thus, in this model of support, traditional segregation practices continue rather than the LS/R teacher becoming an instrument for change in mainstream towards inclusion.

The potential of the LS/R teacher to become an agent of change also surfaced in the qualitative data.

I suppose there is a big question there around, you know, change agents, like are special needs people now, is their expectation that they are change agents, you know, should they be change agents, should there be the expectation of them? You know, what should their voices be in school? You know, should they be proactive as opposed to reactionary?

Interview, stakeholder, S6: 205

Research participants stressed that the role of the LS/R teacher as an adviser was highly valued and very necessary.

... but far more importantly I think are the skills in a sense of bringing along other staff in some ways ... I suppose we tend to turn to the person who co-ordinates special ed. ... Mainly because she has the information.

Interview, principal, PPPrin2: 41

Teachers may naturally take on such an advisory role, but preparation for it should be part of the professional development offered to LS/R teachers. A further expansion of the role appeared to involve the LS/R teacher being seen as a facilitator for colleagues and a collaborator.

I suppose aside from running my own classes, I suppose, co-ordinating everybody else and getting stuff ready for everybody else as well. Because we are a small school, we've got a number of people involved in special needs area who are not necessarily trained. So therefore every single class that they do you have to sort of present something to them to present to the students. So that would be take up a major amount of my time. And aside from that, then there's the paperwork, endless paperwork. Then the files on everybody and follow up on things that have happened and just dealing with members of staff then in relation to individual students. You know, trying to get them to work in mainstream classes. They would be the main time fillers.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT1: 54

This role is not without its attendant challenges as it may bring class teachers and support teachers into conflict (Forlin, 2001). If the LS/R teacher takes on the role of in class facilitator/collaborator, the class teachers no longer get any relief through the withdrawal of difficult students and are simultaneously required to change and adapt their teaching. The skills required to collaborate successfully with colleagues are different to those required to work in isolation. Hence these skills too must be addressed in the professional development programme for LS/R teachers.

5.3.2 Management aspect

Another dimension of the role which surfaced from the qualitative data was the LS/R teachers' management role. Some teachers, and also stakeholders, considered this very important. This aspect should be acknowledged within the structure of the school administration.

You know, they almost have a management responsibility if you like for the area. So at least then you had someone who had a big picture and knew what was going on and could look at the needs of the students and make sure that they had some co-ordinated programme.

Interview, stakeholder, S3: 74

... managing a department ... managing other teachers ... so I just feel that the whole job has become a management issue ... the way you have to run it.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT2: 77

Lots more work needs to be done at middle management, with teachers and ... principals ... I think they have an important role then as well in just facilitating those within school.

Interview, Stakeholder, S6: 99

... ideally in my vision the special needs co-ordinator should be part of the management team with the form masters and the year heads. Sometimes that can happen and sometimes it doesn't happen.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT3: 119

How special education is understood in a school can almost be inferred from the status accorded to the LS/R teacher. If the teacher is part of the middle-management structure then high status will more likely accrue to the area. The teacher will have a mandate to take a more proactive role in promoting inclusion. This permits the LS/R teacher to review the processes of teaching and learning in the whole school (Crowther *et al*,

2001) and a middle-management role enables the teacher to avoid being thinly spread across increasing numbers of pupils with special needs.

5.3.3 Communication and administration skills needed

Aside from these teaching and management skills, supplementary skills were required to undertake the additional demands of the expanded role.

You need to be a good co-ordinator because you have to have good interpersonal skills, you have to interact with management and teachers a lot.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT3: 81

In terms of, I suppose, the skills and knowledge needed to carry out the role ... organisation, I mean that's the key thing in terms of, apart from, it's not necessarily the main principle underlying what we do around special ed, but you know if nothing else there are legal requirements for record-keeping and all that. So, you know, in a very simplified way, you know, basic. Those people have to be good at maintaining records, be good at administration.

Interview, principal, PPPrin2: 18

The finding from the quantitative data, that administration was a considerable burden on teachers, is further substantiated by other reports (ACCS, 2008; O'Conluain, 2007; Stevens, 2008). Further evidence of the administrative burden was attested to by comments from interviewees.

I've only been the co-ordinator for two years now so I'm still just getting into it. Keeping my head above water doing the day-to-day stuff...

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT3: 49

I'm sure you hear it all the time, the whole issue of the time needed to keep up with the admin, you know. And not have it affect or impact on the actual work that you do with the child in the class. That is again a huge issue for us ... but particularly given, you know, the IEPs and all that ...

maybe there's an opportunity to broaden that ... maybe setting aside some time ... for people to work with a small group of their peers and colleagues.

Interview, principal, PPPrin2: 75

... and time is a huge problem when working with colleagues because we have no time to plan.

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 74

What has become a headache at the moment then is, is drawing up timetables, timetabling, I'm expected to do the timetables ... That's apart, over and above all the other things like the testing and the meeting parents, and liaising with NEPS, and arranging for psychological assessments, things like that, and then of course the paperwork ... You have to have the knowledge, you have to know how to do it.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT2: 171

You know, I hate the beginning of the year, and I much prefer to be with the kids, I much prefer to be teaching or doing the testing, or doing, you know analysis, or, you know, I just feel that timetabling, and collaborative, and administrative issues take me away from dealing with the kids.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT2: 271

The school management actually have provided me with two classes for administration. They did that about halfway through the year this year. And also one class to conduct testing in. So that was a huge help because it all just comes down to a time issue, there's so much paperwork and there's so much outside of classroom teaching work to be done ... it was just nice to be given time to do that.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT3: 83

Because you can't kind of put me in a school and then give me no time to plan with the teachers, to meet the parents, to, em, plan a programme for the child, eh, without all those other things being done my role is extremely limited as to how effective I can be. But with those supports I could be a lot more effective ...

Interview, primary teacher, PT1: 102

The requirement to maintain records of students and the paperwork associated with applications for resources and exemptions moves the LS/R teacher further from their area of expertise and teaching role. Perhaps this aspect of the role is one that can be subcontracted to another staff member with excellent administrative skills.

5.3.4 Conclusion

The comments from the interviews and focus groups have grounded the research in the everyday flow of school life and provided a context for issues that arose in the quantitative data. However, the qualitative data also enabled additional issues to emerge. These came from background topics and foreground topics from the interviews and focus groups. For example, the role of the LS/R teacher in collaborating with parents and with SNAs was not highlighted and this is a concern. In contrast, aspects of SEN teachers' roles relating to collaborating with colleagues were highlighted. The survey data provided evidence of a need for an increase in collaborative work, but also of some contradictory attitudes towards this work. This was apparent also in the qualitative data. The importance of collaborative work in schools in facilitating inclusion and enhancing learning has been well flagged. Research evidence indicates that the success or otherwise of creating inclusive schools will lie in designing appropriate support structures within schools and in developing knowledgeable staff capable of supporting learning in their own classrooms and in engaging in collaborative relationships (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007: 253). Research findings suggest a need for increased emphasis on collaborative work, in addition to the focus on individual student-focused and administrative elements, in the professional formation and development of all teachers in initial, induction and continuing in-career teacher education, but particularly for LS/R-SEN teachers. They also point to a need for collaborative work as part of whole-school development and the provision of structures and processes to support such work.

A dimension of the LS/R role – identified as considerably important in international research (see Chapter 1) – emerged in the qualitative but not in the quantitative data: the role's leadership/management aspect. Some interviewees identified the need for the LS/R role to be part of the management team in the school. This is in line with the international findings. As pointed out earlier, research in the UK, for example, has shown that provision for pupils with SEN is a matter for the school as a whole and it has been recommended that SENCos should be members of the school senior-management team in order to play a strategic role (Szwed, 2007b). Our findings, combined with the findings of international research (Bangs, 2005; Layton, 2005; Gerschel, 2005; Szwed, 2007a&b; Black-Hawkins *et al*, 2007), suggest the need to embed leadership training in professional development programmes both for LS/R teachers and for school principals.

Without the reconceptualisation of the role of the LS/R teacher in the Irish education system, which incorporates the facets explored above, the model of support offered to students is manipulation within the traditional special education model instead of a change towards inclusive mainstream education.

5.4 Teacher Professional Development

Research on educational achievement from all over the world and over two generations shows the best means of improving students' learning experience is to improve family and community circumstances. As the OECD has noted, however, factors pertaining to family and community 'are difficult for policy-makers to influence' whereas teachers and teaching are subject to policy influence (OECD, 2005: 26). Also, while non-school variables have the most impact on student learning, of in-school factors, teachers were the single most significant source of variation. There is evidence from international research that teacher preparation contributes significantly to teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002).

As there are differences between the roles and responsibilities of LS/R teachers and class teachers (DES, 2000, 2007), the initial professional education accorded to class teachers is not sufficient to meet the requirements of LS/R teachers who work in SEN. Given recent changes in the Irish education system, particularly around inclusion, a single period of preparation is particularly inappropriate. It is recognised that teacher

education is career-long and professional development opportunities should be provided during the three stages of initial, induction and in-career periods. (DES, 1995; OECD, 2005). The budget allocated to the support of first- and second-level teacher education has increased significantly since the founding of the In-Career Development Unit (ICDU) later to become the Teacher Education Section (TES) in 1994. In total, there has been a 900 per cent increase in funding from £IR5 million to €64 million during 1994-2007 (DES, 2007b). Despite this, expenditure on teacher education is viewed as being below the target for professional development in both the private sector (3 to 5 per cent) and the Civil Service. Investment in professional development stands at 2.2 per cent visà-vis the recommended 4 per cent of payroll. A continued focus on supporting teacher professional development is in line with both Department of Education and Science and national strategy (DES, 2005b). Teacher professional development is considered key in contributing to social and economic goals in its potential to contribute to economic development and promote social inclusion. In this context, TES support for teacher professional development in inclusion/SEN is particularly relevant.

This research aimed to determine the professional development requirements of teachers working in SEN in mainstream schools to ensure that students facing barriers to learning were offered the most effective education suitable for their needs. To this end, several questionnaire elements were directed at eliciting information on teachers' past and future professional development. It must be borne in mind that only one teacher in each school had the opportunity to respond. The questionnaire was addressed to the teacher with main responsibility for SEN. It was evident from the research that many schools had several teachers in the LS/R role, particularly in larger schools where some teachers taught children with special needs. These teachers may have different perceptions and professional development requirements to the teacher who completed the questionnaire. Given the large number of questionnaire respondents from the 816 schools, their geographical and school type distribution, it is contended here that the responses are quite comprehensive. This discussion outlines the responses to the questionnaire and explores their implications for professional development in SEN.

5.4.1 Previous professional development in SEN

The overall participation by primary and post-primary teachers in professional development in SEN was high (87.6 per cent) and referred to certified and non-certified professional development. There was, however, a very wide range of contexts for this professional development in special educational needs – varying from two-hour sessions to masters programmes. A matter of concern is that an eighth of the sample had participated in no in-career development in special education of any kind although engaged in the LS/R area. Variations in qualification by geographical location and school type were evident. Primary teachers were less likely to have a SEN qualification. Teachers in rural schools were less likely than others to have a qualification. Teachers in disadvantaged schools were more likely to be qualified in SEN. Teachers in girls' schools were both more likely to be SEN-qualified and to have participated in in-service courses. Teachers who had actively chosen the LS/R role were more likely to have a qualification than were those who had been simply allocated to the role by management.

As indicated above, a discrepancy exists in SEN qualification between the primary and post-primary sectors. More post-primary teachers (88 per cent) had such a qualification than had primary teachers (39 per cent) – over twice as many post-primary schools in the sample had a qualified SEN teacher compared to primary schools. The lack of appropriately qualified personnel in primary schools has most likely been exacerbated by the rise in students with SEN entering mainstream primary school and insufficient SEN specialist teachers. It seems the situation has deteriorated significantly since the 1998 report on remedial education (Sheil & Morgan, 1998) when 74.12 per cent of the primary school research sample had participated in the DES-funded, one-year, part-time course. A previous INTO survey (INTO, 1994) indicated that only a significant minority of teachers had not participated in the year-long, part-time course in remedial education. While the rate of attrition and teacher retirement may be contributory factors, the upsurge in teachers appointed to SEN posts in primary schools also accounts for the shortage of SEN qualified teachers. In 1987-88, there were 800 LS posts which rose to 5,500 posts in SEN in 2005-06. Primary places in 2006 on the DES-funded, postgraduate diploma in SEN were 184 out of 276 places but these are insufficient to meet the increased demand from primary school teachers. The situation may appear less acute at second level - 88 per cent of respondents had a SEN qualification - but it

masks the reality. Given that the average post-primary school is nearly three times larger than the average primary school, the number of students with SEN in each post-primary school is generally higher than in primary schools. The presence of one qualified teacher in a school with an average student population of 470 does not ensure all students with SEN will have access to a qualified specialist teacher. Given that the ratio of full-time SEN posts to students is 1:303 in the post-primary research sample and that it is less likely that part-time teachers have a SEN qualification, it could be inferred that the ratio of qualified SEN teachers to pupils is far poorer at post-primary level than at primary level. Overall, it would appear that, currently, significant numbers of SEN-unqualified teachers work with students with SEN.

The demand for courses is supported by the interview data:

There still seems to be a lot of teachers out there who don't seem to have the qualifications and want it ... we've had huge demand to take this course.

Interview, stakeholder, S3: 201

The findings on the low level of qualification among a considerable segment of the LS/R teaching cohort is significant and requires an immediate response to ensure that students with the greatest needs get the best possible education by qualified specialist personnel.

Figures for whole staff professional development in SEN showed 57 per cent (n=371) of school principals confirmed there had been whole-school in-service in SEN. This low figure of little over half of schools underscores the imperative to ensure all schools are taking a positive proactive approach to the education of students with special educational needs. The importance of this approach was underscored by stakeholders.

... if we really are talking about professional development we are not just talking about the learning support and resource teacher. Like whole-school training.

Interview, stakeholder, S5: 76

I think we need more in-service on special needs, not just for the learning support resource teachers, but also for the class teachers because [out of that six we mentioned] it's the class teacher who is dealing with this child.

Focus group, primary teachers, BPT2:15

Since the Education Act 1998, at primary and post-primary level, responsibility for the education of all students including those with special needs rests with the class teacher. Many teachers who qualified before this Act, and indeed since then, had no input on SEN in their initial teacher education. In addition, few teachers to date have participated in systematic induction programmes, although these have proven an effective element of continuing professional development (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006). Therefore, whole-school in-service in SEN is a vital element of continuing professional development to guarantee an appropriate education for all students with SEN.

More post-primary principals (68 per cent) reported having whole staff in-service in SEN than did primary principals (44 per cent). This may be explained in part by the emphasis in recent years on in-service to support the new curriculum at primary school with a consequent decrease in time available for in-service in other areas, such as SEN. Nevertheless, whole-school in-service in SEN must be promoted as part of the portfolio of professional development interventions in both sectors nationwide.

5.4.2 Professional development sought

In the research questionnaire, teachers had several opportunities to express their views on the professional development they required. Principals were also asked for their opinions on the most urgent professional development requirements for SEN teachers in their school. The most interesting finding from this section was the consistency of the responses from open and rating questions, and the similarity of the professional development needs expressed by primary and post-primary personnel irrespective of whether they were SEN qualified or not.

5.4.3 Requests for professional development

An open question on their most urgent professional development needs enabled teachers

and principals to offer their views on topics they considered important. Three main

areas emerged from this analysis: the IEP processes; information on various disabilities;

and SEN teaching methodologies.

IEP Process

In-service on the IEP process was the most frequently cited 'urgent professional

development need'. Similar proportions of teachers (16 per cent) and principals (18 per

cent) from primary level and from second level – 23.4 per cent of teachers and 29.5 per

cent of principals - identified the requirement for IEP-related in-service as the most

urgent. Teacher interviews supported this.

Yes, and I think you know a big area that is prevalent at the moment is

the area of IEPs and IPLPs. You know, and depending on the school,

they can very often be the responsibility of the learning support teacher

on their own, with the class teacher having very little input.

Interview, primary teacher, PT5: 78

And again with key stakeholders.

Certainly there's a need for again going back to the legislation and

professional development around developing the IEPs, preparing and

developing IEPs and how that might be done.

Interview, stakeholder, S5: 72

Guidelines on the IEP process (NCSE, 2006a) indicate the specific criteria to be used

when developing IEPs. The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) which makes

IEPs mandatory will be enacted in the near future. In the implementation report (NCSE,

2006b) it is proposed that teacher training in the IEP process will be provided as part of

the roll-out of the legislation. During the research, teachers indicated that the

collaborative aspects of the IEP process, its implementation and review gave rise to

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apprehension. Given the concern of teachers and principals for professional development in this area, it is essential that *all* teachers involved in the process have the opportunity to participate in such programmes.

Information on Various Disabilities

The second most frequently cited professional development need was information on various disabilities. There was agreement that this area was an essential part of continuing professional development by all subgroups – teachers, principals, primary, post-primary, SEN-qualified and SEN-unqualified. The request for specific in-service on particular disabilities was elaborated through responses to the open question on the four most urgent professional development requirements. Some teachers and principals detailed the areas they felt most urgently needed in-service. These were for dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyspraxia and Asperger syndrome. It is likely that the disabilities prioritised reflected current immediacy and the needs of schools. They are certainly in line with expert reports such as those from the task forces on autism and dyslexia (Task Force on Autism, 2001; Task Force on Dyslexia, 2001). However, very low priority was given to a number of areas including chronic illness, epilepsy, hearing impairment and severe-profound learning disability. The implication here is that in developing programmes of professional development, course designers should ensure that information relating to children with disabilities and special educational needs transcends the topical and reflects the full gamut of prevalent conditions.

In responding to the increasing diversity of children attending mainstream schools, teacher education courses in SEN now include much detailed information on various disabilities and recommend appropriate tests to identify the challenges students face and strategies to overcome the associated difficulties. It is here the 'dilemma of difference' (Terzi, 2005) is encountered. While this knowledge of aetiology and assessment is essential, there is a danger that the teacher's focus may reflect the medical model of disability – determining what is 'wrong' with students and remediating them, rather than take the approach prompted by the social model of disability and seek to change and adapt pedagogy and curriculum in ways that include the child. It is far easier to decide that the source of the problem lies with the student with special needs rather than take up the challenge of altering current teaching practices and developing appropriate

curriculum. Therefore, programme designers must be attuned to the implications of the course content and seek to redress any imbalance.

Kershner (2007), in reviewing what teachers need to know about special educational needs, expounded mixed views on the value of knowledge about biological and genetic dimensions of identifiable syndromes and queries how much information on the aetiology of various conditions teachers actually need. The concern is that the search for generic patterns and types will be at the expense of the individual learning differences. The possibility that this new 'scientific' research may give rise to fixed ability labels adds disquiet to this debate. Kershner postulates that a wider knowledge base on meeting students special educational needs can be attained through building on the 'local knowledge which is constructed when teaching specific pupils in school' (ibid). This emphasis by respondents on the aetiology and pedagogy of disabilities was further elaborated on during an interview with a key stakeholder:

I think they [teachers] come on the course wanting what they think is going to be very specialist knowledge, how to teach children with dyslexia, for example. And how to teach children with autism and it's not that — we don't do that. But I think what we try and do is give them a slightly broader picture of what learning difficulties and special needs are ... [We] try and get away from the idea that these children and their needs are always very special. That there's a lot of commonality, there's a lot of good practice which can be applied to a lot of children with difficulties, a lot of children with special needs and that it isn't a case of finding the right technique for the right child and everything is solved.

Interview, stakeholder, S3: 151

Methodology for Special Educational Needs

The third most frequently cited professional development need – 'instructional methodologies' – was common to teachers and principals in both sectors. The implication here was that teachers felt certain SEN specific methodologies would become part of a SEN specialist's repertoire. Research has concluded, however, that while certain methodologies enhance learning opportunities for students with SEN, by

and large, there is 'nothing special about special education'. The methodologies proposed to enable students with special needs access the curriculum enhance the learning of all students (Davis & Florian, 2004; Lewis & Norwich, 2004). The strong demand for professional development on teaching methodologies indicates a consciousness among teachers that strategies not currently utilised would benefit students. In particular, research participants sought information on differentiation and team teaching and, while using such methodologies would indeed benefit students with SEN, their use is not confined to this group. Strategies which move away from the traditional instructional model (teacher and textbook as the main sources of knowledge and lecturing, discussion and reading as the main methodologies) towards more active, experiential learning will benefit all students (Darling-Hammond et al, 2008). Teachers participating in professional development must be given access to information on current, evidence-based methodologies and the opportunity to implement, review and discuss these additional approaches to teaching (ibid). Such teacher education is key to improving the educational experience of all students, not only those with SEN. The advent of children with special needs in mainstream classrooms may well become the impetus for teachers to adopt powerful learning strategies that ensure improved learning for all students. Therefore, knowledge of and the opportunity to experiment with teaching and learning methodologies must be a fundamental component of professional development for special needs. Underpinning this component must be the realisation that our knowledge about learning is fluid and continually expanding and that teachers must join in the discovery for the duration of their career through self-directed professional development and research.

Implications of Wide Range of Professional Development Required

Overall, aside from the consensus on the main types of professional development outlined here – the IEP process, aetiology and methodology, over 50 other professional development needs were identified. A few teachers and principals mentioned these giving testimony to the wide range of roles which SEN teachers are required to undertake. Two issues arise from this. The first is the need for a long-term programme of continual professional development. The second is the need for clarity around the role of the SEN teachers. Requests for professional development in such a variety of areas supports the call for annual follow-up in-service in SEN as recommended by the INTO (INTO, 1994). This view is emphasised in an interview with a key stakeholder.

I think the ongoing updating of skills is necessary, and I think that can be accomplished through the work of the SESS, and through attending the seminars and the conferences and all of that kind of stuff, but I do think, too, that these teachers maybe should be allowed to go for even more specialist courses if, for instance, opening up a unit for children with moderate general learning disabilities, or maybe something in the area of EBD, or certainly autism, opening up an autism unit ... I do think there is real need for more specialist courses.

Interview, stakeholder, S2: 356

Given the changes in the scope of special education and likely changes into the future, many teachers qualified in special education believe continuous professional development in the area is crucial. The need for clarity in the role of the LS/R teacher has been addressed at policy level by the Department of Education and Science guidelines on inclusion (DES, 2000, 2007). Nevertheless, the role's remit needs to be clearly articulated along with strong recommendations to prevent the role becoming unmanageable as has happened in other jurisdictions (Cole, 2005) and yet does not constrain the future development of the role.

Suggested Content for Professional Development Programmes

Understanding what teachers need to know about special education needs is as much to do with knowing how teaching expertise develops in particular social cultural and historical circumstances as it is to do with knowing about particular types of learning difficulty teaching strategy or special resource.

Kershner, 2007

While the key focus of this research was to determine the professional development requirements of mainstream primary and post-primary teachers working in special education, a subsidiary aim was to gather recommendations for appropriate course content for professional development programmes. Information pertaining to this section of the research was sought through three different questions (see Appendices 5,

8, & 11). As a part of this information-gathering exercise, in section two of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to rate in importance (on a scale of 1 to 5 in relation to their needs) a list of potential course components for professional development in SEN. The results were tabulated for primary and post-primary teachers separately and for their combined responses. Several items were grouped into scales and the results tested for differences between primary and post-primary teachers.

There was a remarkable similarity in course content choice by primary and post-primary teachers. Both sectors rated language and literacy; teaching strategies; assessment of learning difficulties; and teaching mathematics in the top five choices of course content. The difference between teachers who had or had not a SEN qualification was not significant. There was a lesser degree of concurrence for the least important components of a programme with both sectors in agreement on only three of the least important components – philosophy, presentation skills and conducting research. In terms of the importance attached by LS/R teachers to the items grouped into scales the results confirmed the patterns observable in the rankings. Teachers attached higher levels of importance to student-focused items, such as the different types of learning difficulty, assessment of learning difficulties, interpreting psychological assessments and the IEP process. The next level of importance was attached to items on the curriculum-focused scale, such as developing alternative curricula and teaching different subject areas. The importance attached to the collaborative scale involving liaison with other teachers and with parents and school planning was lowest, although the latter item was included in teachers' top ten rankings.

Additional information was sought on what teachers considered the ten most important areas to include in a programme of professional development. In relation to their needs, teachers were asked to rank from 1 to 10 the key areas they thought ought to be integrated in a programme of professional development in special education. These mirror the ratings teachers gave for aspects of a potential course and give added support to the reliability of the data on desired course components. Here, as with the ratings for course components, the highest ranking elements were types of learning difficulty, assessment of learning difficulties, teaching strategies, developing education plans, language and literacy, school policy and planning for SEN, developing alternative curricula, psychological development, interpreting psychological assessments, and the law and SEN.

Irrespective of the differences in SEN-qualified status, similarities emerged from respondents' perceptions of important components of a course. This finding appears to indicate the current professional development for SEN does not promote teacher resilience sufficiently. There may be far too great a reliance on training teachers to respond to specific dysfunctions – giving recipes for particular difficulties and 'handy hints'. If insufficient attention is paid to the theoretical underpinnings and developing teachers' capabilities in researching, implementing and evaluating effective teaching and learning strategies, they will not be prepared for the diversity of students they will encounter over their careers. The concept of sustainable professional development and teacher resilience is one which should underpin programmes. The agreement by primary and post-primary teachers that the philosophy and sociology of inclusion, and research, are the least important components of a course is of interest and contrasts with stakeholders' viewpoint on the importance of ensuring:

... that they've a philosophical position from where all this inclusion idea has come, you know, that it's part of a broad social movement, and policy shifts, and it's finally landed into their classrooms, that they have to understand where all that comes from, and their responsibilities to society, and to the public.

Interview, stakeholder, S6: 99

It is noteworthy that in the literature on teacher professional development, these areas are considered crucial in contributing to the cultivation of a positive mindset towards inclusion. Time and again, the importance of attitude and mindset in developing inclusive schools is emphasised in the literature (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004; Loreman *et al*, 2005). This can be achieved through the study of sociology and philosophy of inclusive education. Along with psychology, these disciplines are fundamental in creating the foundation from which teachers can evolve and develop as professionals.

Teachers also underrate research. Conducting research into special education ranked only just above the critical reflective courses just mentioned at the very bottom of the rankings. Yet it is through researching their own practice that teachers can move beyond mere recipe application in their teaching, towards adopting the analytical and creative response to teaching and learning that is the hallmark of best practice (Timperley *et al*,

2007). The notion of the teacher as researcher is gaining prominence in the literature on teacher education and growing in importance as the student population becomes increasingly diverse (Davis & Florian, 2004). The centrality of teachers' school-based inquiry as a means of expanding the knowledge and research base of educational practice is one that should be incorporated in professional development programmes in SEN (Kershner, 2007). Thus, the evidence points to the need for the foundation disciplines of philosophy and sociology, and research skills, to be incorporated in professional development programmes for teachers in special educational needs and inclusion.

Given the international emphasis on the importance of research/evidence-based teaching and its value to high-quality teaching and learning and of the need for a critical and reflective profession (see Chapter 1), the evident absence of such awareness among such a large cohort of LS/R teachers with the main responsibilities for SEN in their schools, and of their principals, is a matter of concern. Of course, it may be that the relative recent development of inclusion in mainstream Irish schools gives rise to the perception among teachers of pressing needs which must be addressed before the more developmental aspects of inclusive practice can be fostered.

Thus, we see from the research that a possible programme of professional development might contain the following: types of learning difficulty; assessment of learning difficulties; teaching strategies; developing education plans; language and literacy; school policy and planning for SEN; developing alternative curricula; psychological development; interpreting psychological assessments; and the law and SEN. The desire to develop team building and leadership skills shown in the qualitative data should also be added to a list of course components and, notwithstanding their omission from the research findings, but based on international research, modules which promote the teacher as a researcher and the teacher as a reflective practitioner are also advisable.

5.4.4 Prevailing issues in SEN programme development

Designing professional development programmes in SEN for teachers is a complex undertaking and several factors must be considered. Among these are obtaining academic consensus on selection of content and learning outcomes, aligning the programme with the external and internal criteria for accrediting courses, incorporating

information on legislative and policy changes, reflecting a range of other considerations such as the following: adjustments implied by adopting a social model of disability; teachers' emerging roles; cutting-edge, research-based knowledge on SEN-related issues; current pedagogical methodologies; advances in teacher education methodology; the views of key stakeholders; and, most crucially, the self-selected professional development requirements of SEN teachers. These factors can be loosely grouped into the following categories: issues relating to content; course delivery; and accreditation.

Issues Relating to Content

Academic v practical elements

In the design of a course, a balance must be achieved between academic and practical elements. If academic elements predominate then a lack of relevance to working life may be perceived. However if practical 'tips for teachers' predominate, then participants may not have the opportunity to develop the theoretical background which is essential in determining the value of existing practices and evolving their own practices. As one interviewee stated, there must be a balance between the two dimensions:

I think it's important as well to develop, to be allowed the opportunity to develop, a good conceptual understanding of special education and what it means, to you. Each person may have a different view of it but that they're allowed or facilitated in developing that concept. Then also, I think, there has to be a practical element to this as well and the ability to implement a range of appropriate evidence-based teaching strategies.

Interview, stakeholder, S1: 36

Consequentially, as part of SEN programmes, teachers often study a broad range of the core foundation disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and psychology. Teachers may not initially regard these topics as being of immediate value (O'Gorman, 2006). The rationale for their inclusion in professional development programmes is the necessity for teachers to develop a strong conceptual framework within which to construct their practice. In special education, this foundation will ensure that teachers' practices are grounded in educational theory and in the theory of inclusion. Without the

foundation disciplines, there is a danger that teachers' school practices will be unable to adapt to meet new challenges and teachers will revert to traditional pedagogical or segregating practices.

In relation to the practical elements of a course, it is a key requirement that teachers are introduced to practical skills which enhance their work and which they can disseminate to their colleagues, such as assessment techniques and teaching strategies. However, if we accept that a teacher is a professional, not a mere technician, then a course which relies on merely presenting a selection of skills and teaching tips is insufficient to be designated professional development. Equally, reliance on perfecting a few strategies and techniques is a short-term solution to a long-term career.

There is a tension here between the immediate need for usable information that the teacher can utilise and the need for long-term, deep understanding that nourishes and promotes sustainable professional development. Unless teachers have had opportunities to develop critical and analytical skills which enable them to evaluate, adapt and develop their own thinking and practice, the value of a course is self-limiting. Change is inevitable and teachers must be given the tools to respond appropriately over a long period of time. This is the creative artistry of teaching where teachers respond to change with new and innovative approaches to the challenges presented to them. In this regard, teachers must use the theoretical, conceptual and practical information from a course to become active researchers of both their own practice and that of the school community. The notion of teacher as a researcher must become an elemental part of the professional development course. This has been among the reasons for the great interest in Finland's high performance in international testing and the international perception of its teacher education as very high quality. The Finnish goal over more than a decade of reform of teacher education is to develop teachers who will base their educational decisions on rational arguments in addition to experiential argument. To put it another way, to develop teachers with the capacity to use research and research-derived competences in their ongoing teaching and decision-making (Westbury et al, 2005). It is, of course, essential to examine carefully the different kinds of evidence which legitimately enter into educational deliberations at the policy and professional practice levels, and at the conclusions that can be drawn from different kinds of research (Pring, 2004: 212). In this way, through practitioner research, through familiarity with key international

research findings, though interpersonal reflection and interaction with others, continual questioning of practice occurs. This is the hallmark of the teacher as a professional – the ability to analyse, develop, renew and create.

Legislation, policy and guidelines

A further influential factor impinging on course design is the impact of policy and legislation on the changing the role of the SEN teacher. The need for course designers to be cognisant of current policy and legislation is essential and this information must be in the public arena and openly available. While the implications of the Education Act 1998 and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 (Government of Ireland 1998, 2004) are possible to deduce from the statutes, educational policy in the areas is not quite so well defined, particularly at post-primary level. At primary level, organisation of provision for students with SEN has been determined by Department of Education and Science circulars, periodic communications to schools and by the publication of a set of guidelines. However, in the post-primary sector, despite significant changes in special education generally, few such circulars have been issued to indicate how schools should orchestrate the supports they have been allocated for special needs. Post-primary schools were at liberty to determine how best to utilise their resources. The result has been the evolution of an array of differing practices of varying quality. With the recent publication of the guidelines relating to the IEP process (NCSE, 2006a) and post-primary guidelines on SEN (DES, 2007), there is now a comprehensive resource to refer to for planning and organising SEN practice. This should provide clarity for the SEN teacher's role and resource allocation. It will take some time, however, to eradicate questionable practices that currently prevail and for schools to adopt the proposed changes vis-à-vis SEN teams and collaborative approaches to the education of students with SEN. During interviews and focus groups, it became apparent that many LS/R teachers in both sectors were unaware of the content of the Department of Education and Science guidelines. Consequently, awareness of current legislation, policy and guidelines must be a key component of a teacher education programme in SEN.

Preparation for the role of SEN co-ordinator

The legislation and guidelines categorically state that each teacher has responsibility for the education of all the children in their class, including those with special educational needs. Consequently, as we have outlined above, other dimensions of the SEN teacher's role need to be equally highlighted in professional development, such as collaborating with colleagues, with parents and with other professionals.

My big issue is helping the teachers to teach for inclusion and some teachers are more experienced than others so we've got a plan and template and all that. The biggest issue is around time for the class teacher and the support teacher to plan together.

Focus group, primary teachers, BPT3: 10

Although the need for greater opportunities for collaboration emerged from teachers during their reflections on their role and during the interviews, it did not translate into specific requests for professional development. Emphasising collaborative practices in a programme of professional development, however, may support the dissemination of the skills and knowledge developed by individual teachers on the course to the whole-school community. Thus, one possible contribution to creating a collaborative culture may be to encourage schools to have their teachers attend professional development courses in SEN, and then share that knowledge with others — creating a 'waterfall effect' whereby the whole-school community can share the expertise and pupils' educational experience be enriched in a manifold way.

Given that the role of the LS/R teacher as a collaborator and team facilitator is very different from that of the class teacher or withdrawal situation there is an urgent need for consciousness raising and skill development in this important area.

Individual v holistic approach

If the emphasis of professional development gives prominence to specialist knowledge and techniques, it may inadvertently lead to the creation of a single 'expert' teacher solely responsible for the educational attainment of all students with special needs in the school. The quote below from a teacher illustrates the problem.

Any problem that any student seems to have is brought to me, whether or not it might be, say, a literacy problem or numeracy problem or a behavioural problem or even if they are, well, I suppose all problems fall under those, they are all in my remit but even if, say, the child gets distracted easily and ends up staring out the window most classes, this is brought to me so that I can see what we can do about it.

Interview, post-primary teacher, PPT3: 99

There are also dangers inherent in the development of a field of expertise that will lead to the creation of a new 'fiefdom' within the school.

There is a huge question, of course, around the professionalisation of the discipline, and what genre of special needs it's going to take on. And, you know, whether it will develop its own self-serving interests of, you know, categorising and labelling and looking for more resources, and all that type of stuff, you know.

Interview, stakeholder, S6: 207

This phenomenon of a strong interconnection between having an expert on the staff and rising numbers of children with SEN being identified has been noted internationally (see discussion in 5.3). In having a staff expert whose focus is assessment, a symbiotic circle evolves where the LS/R expert identifies more and more students with special needs thus legitimising increasing demands for more specialist LS/R teachers whose focus is student assessment (Emanuelsson, 2001). Other research in Ireland has noted a similar phenomenon where the assessment and identification of students is linked to the quest for additional staff (Mac Ruairc, 2006). This can lead to a 'teacher for tokens' scenario where identification of students with SEN leads to additional staff. In such a situation, to retain staff, there is a disincentive for student improvement. Furthermore, the linking of assessment to obtaining additional student resource hours lends itself to an association of individual need with individual tuition and exclusion from the mainstream class. This may not always be in the student's best interests. There needs to be a shift away from this medically influenced deficit approach where assessment is the core skill of the SEN teacher, and a reorientation of the role towards expertise in transformative pedagogy.

The affective domain

A professional development programme that solely focuses on expanding the teacher's

expert knowledge of, and skills in, SEN may diminish another dimension of the

teacher's role – the pastoral care aspect. In the students' and parents' eyes, this is often

the most important aspect of a teacher's role.

How do SEN teachers best help children with special needs? I suppose

they get to know them, get to know the child.

Yeah, they get to know the child in more ways than a normal teacher

would have to know the child.

They have to know the child's needs and mood swings and ... They really

have to know the child more so than with any other children and get the

child to trust them so that if anything happens they will go to them.

Focus group, parents, PaRuPPT2: 135–137

Having one teacher who cares about them and who regards them positively may be the

single element which transforms school from a negative to a positive experience. The

recognition of the individuality of each pupil is central to the teacher-pupil learning

partnership (Buber, 1987). Hence, if a course focuses exclusively on only ensuring that

information on SEN is transmitted to teachers, the affective domain may be overlooked

and with it the nurturing and nourishing of the student which is crucial in special needs

education. The recognition that a student has a life beyond the school gates must also be

implicit in the content of the professional development.

And you know the right and need of that child to go on and lead an

independent fulfilled life out of that. That is not just focused purely on

their learning. That there's the whole social, emotional independent

living philosophy needs to come into it.

Interview, stakeholder, S5: 72

This acknowledgement of the many ways a teacher can contribute to the growth and

development of the whole person legitimises their inclusion in a professional

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development programme in SEN. They also serve to remind us that education is more than 'learning to know' but also about learning 'to be', learning 'to do' and most importantly, learning 'to live together' (Delors, 1998).

Issues Relating to the Delivery of Professional Development

There are options for teachers in Ireland in accessing general professional development. Expertise can be developed through self-initiated research utilising a variety of media from textbooks to the internet. Sharing practice and knowledge with colleagues and participating in communities of learning either informally or through professional associations provide other options. Undertaking certified courses or non-award-bearing programmes are further alternatives. These options may be self-financed or funded by the Department of Education and Science. In all, the variety and availability of teacher professional development opportunities has increased in recent years (Granville, 2005).

Options are similarly varied for SEN/inclusion. Professional development opportunities exist from doctoral level to half-day in-service and are subject to varying degrees of corroboration. The origins of these programmes are diverse. Some were developed independently in response to perceived lacunae in the area. Others were requested by the Department of Education and Science. Furthermore, the external validation of these courses is also varied. In some programmes, the Department was directly involved in content and delivery and others were subject to the rigours of the university accreditation system. Yet again, some courses have no external validation or accreditation.

It is outside the scope of the present report to explore in depth the debate pertaining to the context and structure of professional development provision. Several issues relate to how, where and when professional development takes place and who pays for it. A further danger is that the range of providers confuses teachers and may appear as 'a very fractured support system'.

The whole professional development structure is fractured, with a multiplicity of agents competing with each other.

Interview, stakeholder, S6: 76

The necessity for professional development in special education is stated Department of Education and Science policy (DES, 2000b, 2007b) however, the timing, structure and overall coherence of professional development remain problematic (ACCS, 2008; Granville, 2005).

As noted in the research findings, professional development available in SEN varies tremendously in duration and contact hours. Questions must arise regarding the comparative effectiveness. While short, isolated inputs may be a cost-effective method of ensuring large numbers of teachers have access to professional development, the effectiveness and impact of such in-service must be considered. There is a need to move from short once-off presentations towards structured, collaborative inquiry into common concerns with opportunities to access expertise. In a longitudinal study on teacher professional development, the most effective programmes 'are usually longer in duration, allow teachers the opportunity to practise and reflect upon their teaching and are embedded in ongoing teaching activities' (Boyle *et al*, 2004).

The findings of this research project will assist providers of professional development programmes to determine whether the courses on offer match the current needs of LS/R teachers in Ireland at this time, bearing in mind that not all professional development needs to be a response to practice-based teaching issues. A balance must be achieved between short, fire-brigade sessions to address the immediate challenges faced by teachers and the provision of opportunities for sustained engagement with core educational issues in all their complexity. It is through such a fusion that the needs of all students including the most vulnerable members of society will be met with integrity.

Issues Relating to Accreditation

In the case of accredited courses in higher education institutions (HEIs), among the external factors influencing course design are the institutions' own accreditation requirements and the structural adjustments necessary following from the 1999 Bologna Declaration (European Union, 1999). These European-based factors which have already affected course design, will enable students transfer academic credits between EU institutions and also allow for the comparability and transferability of qualifications within the EU. Irish universities have participated in the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project which is one of Europe's few projects that actually links the political

objectives set in the Bologna Declaration to the higher education sector. Tuning was a project developed by and meant for higher education institutions. Its main aim was to contribute significantly to the elaboration of a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications in higher education in each of the signatory countries of the Bologna process. These are described in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile (www.tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/). The European credit transfer system (ECTS) was an integral part. In this highly influential project, the discourse of competences and intended learning outcomes was used in course design and this is increasingly being adopted in institutions of higher education. As pointed out in Chapter 1, the term 'competences' is used to mean a useful grouping of capabilities and capacities that students acquire or develop during a programme (Gonzales & Wagenaar, 2007) and, as long as a 'checklist' approach is avoided, they can be professionally benign (Coolahan, 2007). A competence approach to teaching and teacher education has already been embedded into teacher education in legislation in Section 6 (b)(ii) of the Teaching Council Act 2001 where one of the councils 's objects is 'to establish and promote the maintenance and improvement of standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence of teachers'. The Codes of Professional Conduct published by the Teaching Council set out the broad principles arising (www.teachingcouncil.ie). It is likely that as Irish universities implement the Bologna process, accredited courses in teacher education, including SEN courses, will express their objectives in terms of intended learning outcomes and will describe components in terms of the competences to be attained at the different levels of the first, second and third cycles. Indeed, some universities have already adopted these approaches.

In Ireland, discussions on developing parity between teacher education programmes in SEN have been taking place. It is now an opportune time to broaden these discussions and introduce a European dimension. Agreeing on accreditation processes and core programme elements which should be common, European-wide features of professional development programmes in SEN will be a complex process. There is a need, however, to develop a quality assurance mark for courses to indicate that comparable criteria were used in the accreditation process, and core competences and knowledge were included. Although the debate on standards and competences in teacher education is unresolved (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2005), general principles for SEN courses can be developed

which take into account the differing systems and which do not result in the homogeneity that can stultify change and limit development.

5.4.5 Conclusion

The number of children with SEN attending mainstream schools has been increasing steadily as have teachers engaged in specifically supporting the children. Since the introduction of the Department of Education and Science funded professional development programmes in SEN, teacher access to specialist qualifications has risen. With the advent of the Department of Education and Science Special Education Support Service, the availability of whole-school in-service has also increased. These provisions for continuous professional development are steps in the right direction that must be continued as the numbers of children with SEN in mainstream schools grow and their expectation of and right to an appropriate education is upheld in law. Continuous professional development can be system-led, school-led or in response to individual professional development needs.

Continuing professional development that is system-led may perpetuate dependency among teachers (Sugrue *et al*, 2001). Such activities are initiated, implemented and evaluated by outside agencies and teachers are passive participants. Much of the professional development in Ireland has adopted this model – the in-service provided to support new curriculum and programmes is a case in point. Continuing professional development that is school-led tends to develop closed school systems with tightly defined boundaries (Edwards, 2007). Professional development that occurs in this context may simply replicate existing practices and fail to develop partnerships with outside agencies that can better promote distributed expertise. Continuing professional development that is individually led reflects the differing needs at the various stages of a teacher's career (Coolahan, 2003) and it promotes teacher resilience (Day & Gu, 2007). However, such professional development may be limited in impact on student learning (Cordingley & Temperley, 2006). The need to balance these individual, local and national professional development needs has been recognised since the publication of the White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995).

The Department of Education and Science funded SEN diploma offers the potential for such a balance of professional development needs. The national need for professional development in SEN (underscored by the departmental funding) is satisfied by the development of system capacity; the school need (highlighted by the school support of the application) is met by the strong school-institution link that evolves over the duration of the year-long programme; the individual professional development need (accentuated by the decision to apply for the course) is met through a focus on exploring the individuals specific challenges. Other aspects of the course also serve to emphasise its potential as an exemplar for continuing professional development – the strong network that evolves throughout the duration of the course as participants share expertise in the attainment of common goals, the development of a community of practice that sustains further professional development, the element of school-based action research that ensures impact on student learning and, finally, the access to expertise and research-based evidence of the institution.

Clearly, given the findings from this research on the range of areas that should contribute to teacher education programmes in SEN, a programme of a single year's duration is insufficient to include all the necessary dimensions. Furthermore, it is improbable that one year of professional development could prepare a teacher for all the pedagogical and educational challenges that will inevitably arise over a 40-year career. Professional development in special education should not be seen as an isolated, one-off course but as the expansion of a life-long journey of continuous professional development, which commenced with initial teacher education, and progressed through a systematic induction programme and will continue throughout the professional career. Most importantly, there is a need to ensure that teachers are choice makers in the professional development they identify for their needs.

I also think teachers should be self-determiners of their own continuing professional development and they should be enabled really, to choose, well, what is the best way to learn, maybe I can do this online, maybe I don't like online, maybe I want a face-to-face programme, maybe I just need to read a book on this. So that teachers need to be more active in identifying their own continuing professional development needs.

Interview, stakeholder, S1: 50

6 Recommendations

6.1 School Plan

Responses from LS/R teachers indicated a weakness in the survey schools regarding written plans for special education. Thus it is recommended that all schools should develop a cyclical framework to promote inclusion. This should include a policy which incorporates a written plan of all measures taken to promote an inclusive school. Details should be included on a strategy for implementing, appraising and reframing the policy and the plan based on evidence gathered from an evaluation of the effectiveness of their implementation. Policy details on the school's strategy to promote an inclusive school for all marginalised pupils including those with disabilities and additional educational needs should be developed along with, and circulated to, the whole-school community. The policy should become part of the school's conceptual ethos. The plan should include the roles and responsibilities of staff members with respect to all measures taken.

6.2 SEN Adviser

Drawing on the literature review and on issues emerging from the qualitative data, the need for development of the school advisory role for the LS/R became apparent, and that the person most senior in this position should be part of the school management team. The role of an in-school SEN adviser should be established to take overall responsibility for the co-ordination of special education in school and to act as a source of knowledge and skills for colleagues – a type of consultancy service for teachers giving advice on inclusive pedagogy. The remit of this SEN adviser role should be clearly articulated in a manner which establishes boundaries but does not constrain the role's future development. Its management and leadership function should be acknowledged and the SEN adviser should be a member of the school management team. Time should be provided for the co-ordination and administration aspects of the SEN adviser. Time should be provided to promote collaboration and allow for planning between general teachers, other LS/R teachers and the SEN adviser. The development of

SEN teams within schools should be promoted and opportunities for developing expertise afforded to all participants.

6.3 Collaborative Working

Evidence pointed strongly to the need to develop the collaborative aspects of the LS/R role. Therefore, a management and reporting structure, which includes other teachers, SNAs and other ancillary staff, needs to be formally established. Time should be allocated for meaningful and empowering contact between schools and parents/guardians which acknowledge the contribution they can make to the education of their children. There should be close collaborative links with external agencies. Partnerships between schools and teacher education institutions should be promoted to explore and research effective inclusive special education. To further foster collaborative working, the Special Education Support Service for schools should include a strong emphasis on ongoing support for this area. Greater links between the National Council for Special Education's special education needs officers and schools should be developed. Several reports reviewed in this study (the Task Force on Autism, 2001) stress that fully supporting children with disabilities and special educational needs means collaborative work should also entail links with the Health Services Executive. It is recommended, therefore, that these should be established at the school and system level. All schools should have access to the National Educational Psychological Service.

6.4 Course Provision and Components

• The core of the inquiry was around the professional development needs of the LS/R/SEN teachers. Evidence indicated a need for ongoing professional development for teachers in this role. Accordingly, given the importance of this role for pupils with special needs/disabilities and that this requires ongoing resources, it is recommended that the role of the Department of Education and Skills as a support service for specialist and general teachers should be developed and, in consultation with the education partners, should map and resource a framework for in-career professional development for teachers which would offer a range of options for continuing professional development (CPD) by universities,

colleges, other providers and schools themselves. Department of Education and Science funded course provision in the universities and colleges of education for LS/R teachers should continue and be expanded.

Professional development courses in SEN/inclusion for LS/R teachers should include:

- o Leadership training.
- o Skill development in teamwork and team-teaching.
- Skills in collaboration and liaison with parents, other teachers, special needs assistants, stakeholders and support services.
- O Skills in presentation to enable teachers to share knowledge with others and create a 'waterfall effect'. In this way the whole-school community can share the LS/R teachers' expertise. This would also contribute to the creation of a collaborative culture in schools.
- o Management skills in developing good working relationships and including time management, record-keeping and general administrative skills.
- Knowledge of relevant legislation, policy, guidelines, circulars and planning documents.
- O The area of instructional methodologies, transformative pedagogy, effective group work, peer learning, etcetera.
- o Knowledge of the psychological development of children and adolescents.
- Knowledge of the aetiology of disabilities and conditions giving rise to special educational needs and possible therapeutic and pedagogic interventions.
- Skills in the assessment of learning difficulties and diagnostic teaching linked to assessment.
- Language and literacy education.
- o Mathematics education.
- The social dimension of SEN/inclusion.
- o Knowledge of the primary and post-primary curriculum and the ability to adapt the curricula, and available or alternative curricula.
- o Knowledge of the national qualifications framework.
- o In the case where specialist interventions are required to optimise effective education for pupils with specific conditions, these should form part of

- continuing professional development for LS/R teachers.
- o The philosophy, psychology and sociology of inclusive education.
- Awareness of international research, general research skills and practitioner research skills and collaborative inquiry in order to develop research-based professionalism.
- O Teachers should be involved as choice makers in the professional development they identify for their needs.
- Existing links between the universities, the Teaching Council and the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Science should be maintained and enhanced to ensure the acknowledgement of accredited professional development courses for accreditation as a SEN specialist.
- Opportunities for career-long professional development should be maintained through financial support and time allocation.
- o Inclusive theory and practice relating to pupils with disabilities/SEN, and other marginalised groups, should form an integral part of all teacher education at all stages of the '3Is' from initial teacher education through induction and on to in-career professional development.
- O All LS/R teachers should have access to professional development in SEN/inclusion irrespective of geographical location.
- The whole-school staff and community should have access to regular inservice in SEN/inclusion.
- All principals should participate in professional development in SEN/inclusion as part of a leadership programme.

6.5 Research and Review

 To ensure that an effective inclusive education at the highest international standard is provided, and that the changing needs of students, teachers and schools are met, professional development in SEN/inclusion should be the subject of ongoing research and review.

6.5.1 Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the views of senior LS/R teachers, school principals and a cohort of other stakeholders on the professional development needs of LS/R teachers. The report's authors were keenly aware that many teachers in the school system are allocated to resource/learning support work for a few hours a week and that their professional profiles and continuing professional development needs are not included here. Further research could usefully focus on the needs of this particular category of teachers who are also assigned to the support of the system's most marginalised children. It was beyond the study's scope to investigate the effectiveness of available approaches or the professional development opportunities currently provided. It is the authors' view that these issues also would prove fruitful to research. Some of the report's recommendations would involve changes to work practices in schools. It was, again, beyond the study's scope to go into detail on concomitant issues that might be explored.

6.6 Conclusion

This research was undertaken at a timely juncture when fundamental changes have occurred to advance the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Identifying the professional development that teachers require to enable them to respond to this challenge was the key task of this research. Its findings and the ensuing recommendations are all directly relevant to the special education sector and to inclusive practices in mainstream schools. They are targeted at the promotion of best practice in inclusive education. The recommendations seek to contribute to the development of a just and socially inclusive society (which is the avowed aim of our education system) and to begin to address the educational needs of the most vulnerable members of our society. The objective is to ensure that children with disabilities and special educational needs are given equal status to those of their peers and an effective education appropriate to their needs. It is acknowledged that, during the period of the writing-up of these research results, the Irish economy has moved into a period of recession with accompanying cutbacks and retrenchment. Given the long history of

marginalisation and segregation of children with special educational needs and disabilities in Ireland until relatively recent times (Education Working Group, 1996; Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, 1996; Task Force on Autism, 2001), it is strongly recommended that funding for the professional development of LS/R teachers – so fundamental to the successful inclusion of these vulnerable children in mainstream schools – be protected and, where possible, increased.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethical Considerations

This appendix draws upon the guidelines and policy for ethical approval formulated by University College Dublin, as they apply to this project on the professional development for teachers working in the area of special education/inclusion in mainstream schools. Reference is made to the project throughout this section, as appropriate. Please refer to the Human Research Ethics Committee, *The Summary of Guidelines and Policy for Ethical Approval of Research involving Human Subjects*, (available at: www.ucd.ie/researchethics/pdf/hrec_doc1_the_summary_of_guidelines_and_policy_for_ethical_approval.pdf.

The Guidelines and Policy for Ethical Approval of Research involving Human Subjects at UCD are based on best practice in research and are summarised below. Their application to the research reported here is indicated. UCD considers that ethics serve to identify research conduct which is good, desirable and acceptable. While the primary purpose of the UCD ethical guidelines is to protect the welfare and rights of people who participate in research, they are also intended to facilitate research that will benefit the community or society and to provide an institutional reference point for ethical consideration relevant to all human research. The ethical guidelines and any other related university guidelines and policies apply to all members of University College Dublin who conduct research that involves human subjects and to non-UCD staff and students whose research utilises UCD facilities or takes place on UCD premises. The recognition and acceptance of the responsibility for determining that research fulfils these ethical principles begins with the individual researcher, and extends to the school, college and the university. All of the personnel involved with this research project were aware of the university's ethical guidelines and their procedures were informed by them. A detailed outline of this research on the professional development for teachers working in the area of special education/inclusion in mainstream schools was provided to the Human Research Ethics Committee and ethical approval was granted.

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UCD sees the essential prerequisite for ethical research as the integrity of the researcher, which may be defined as being truthful and living up to professional standards. In practice, this means that research is conducted according to established rules, regulations, guidelines, or professional codes as set out by the university. The basic ethical principles include respect for persons, beneficence, competence and justice. Researchers must only pursue research questions designed to contribute to knowledge, be committed to the pursuit and protection of truth, and rely only on research methods appropriate to the discipline for which they are trained. Researchers should strive to ensure and maintain high standards of competence in their work, to recognise the boundaries of their particular competences and the limitations of their expertise. They should engage in research practices and use only those techniques for which they are trained by qualification, education or experience. These principles and practices were observed by the project which applied standard educational quantitative and qualitative techniques to the study of the roles, responsibilities and professional development needs in-career teachers in Ireland with responsibility for learning support/resource/special education support of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream schools.

The university explicitly states that it is the researcher's responsibility to avoid, prevent, or minimise harm to others (harm here means an injury to the rights, safety or welfare of a research participant and may include physical, psychological, social, financial or economic factors). All reasonably foreseeable risks should be explained in the process of informed consent and, in general, research involving deception, concealment or covert observation is not considered ethical because voluntary and fully informed consent cannot be obtained. The research should clarify the real nature of and rationale for the research and seek to remove any misconception. The letters and interview preambles included in the other appendices to this report show that informed consent was a guiding principle of the research. The process of informed consent involves describing the research to potential participants. It is defined as 'a process by which an individual voluntarily expresses his or her willingness to participate in a particular trial, after having being informed of all aspects of the study that are relevant to the decision to participate' by the university. The university considers this process to be ongoing, beginning before consent forms are signed and continuing until the subject is no longer

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involved in the study. Informed consent requires that participants have a genuine understanding of the research, which involves full disclosure of information about the research to potential subjects including an adequate understanding of the research procedures, the risks and benefits of the research, rights of the subjects and the voluntary nature of participation. Vulnerable groups refer to categories of people who are not legally able to provide informed consent due to age or incompetence, or who are in an unequal relationship with the researcher. These groups require specific procedures under the university guidelines. However, this research project did not involve gathering information from vulnerable groups.

Confidentiality is also an important ethical consideration. Individuals have a right to keep a part of their lives free from intrusion, and information privacy is an area of particular importance. A fundamental requirement of ethical research is that information disclosed within the context of a research relationship should be kept confidential. It is the duty of the researcher to protect the level of confidentiality agreed in the informed consent process, as far as is legally possible. Research participants must be informed of the extent to which confidentiality can be maintained and the measures taken to ensure this level of confidentiality. Anonymity is the best protection of confidentiality in regard to personal information and records. All questionnaires in this project permitted respondents to return them anonymously. A section asked permission from those willing to participate in further stages of the research, such as the qualitative interviews and focus groups, and to provide contact details if they were willing. Those who gave such permission formed the population for the qualitative research. All data from the quantitative and qualitative elements of the project were anonymised and stored on secure PCs in UCD. Paper data (questionnaires and interview notes) were likewise anonymised where there were any identifiers and were stored in a secure location within UCD. Paper copies of original data are destroyed as soon as the data are transcribed electronically.

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Appendix 2 School Distribution of Sample by County

School distribution of sample by county.

County	Level of school				T . 1	
	Post-primary		Primary		Total	
	4	1.0%	5	1.2%	9	1.1%
Cavan	8	2.0%	13	3.2%	21	2.6%
Clare	5	1.3%	11	2.7%	16	2.0%
Cork	45	11.3%	50	12.2%	95	11.7%
Donegal	17	4.3%	18	4.4%	35	4.3%
Dublin	97	24.3%	58	14.1%	155	19.1%
Galway	26	6.5%	26	6.3%	52	6.4%
Kerry	15	3.8%	14	3.4%	29	3.6%
Kildare	19	4.8%	14	3.4%	33	4.1%
Kilkenny	7	1.8%	7	1.7%	14	1.7%
Laois	6	1.5%	5	1.2%	11	1.4%
Leitrim	4	1.0%	4	1.0%	8	1.0%
Limerick	21	5.3%	20	4.9%	41	5.1%
Longford	5	1.3%	6	1.5%	11	1.4%
Louth	8	2.0%	12	2.9%	20	2.5%
Mayo	13	3.3%	27	6.6%	40	4.9%
Meath	9	2.3%	13	3.2%	22	2.7%
Monaghan	7	1.8%	6	1.5%	13	1.6%
Offaly	5	1.3%	8	1.9%	13	1.6%
Roscommon	5	1.3%	12	2.9%	17	2.1%
Sligo	9	2.3%	8	1.9%	17	2.1%
Tipperary	20	5.0%	18	4.4%	38	4.7%
Waterford	9	2.3%	12	2.9%	21	2.6%
Westmeath	5	1.3%	9	2.2%	14	1.7%
Wexford	12	3.0%	20	4.9%	32	4.0%
Wicklow	17	4.3%	15	3.6%	32	4.0%
Unknown	1	.3%	0	.0%	1	.1%
Total	399		411		810	

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 3 Letter Accompanying Questionnaire to Post-Primary Teachers



School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax01-7161143

June 7th 2007

Dear Colleague,

Questionnaire on teachers' in-service requirements in SEN

I am carrying out research in the area of Learning Support/Special Education Needs. The working title of the investigation is:

'The professional development requirements of teachers working in the area of LS/SEN in primary and post primary schools'

I would appreciate it if you would complete the enclosed questionnaire as your input into this research would be invaluable. Your concerns are representative of teachers engaged in direct contact with students with special educational needs. As such, your opinions are fundamental to informing the content, structure, and delivery of the courses and programmes that are offered in the area of special education.

As a former teacher myself, I am aware of the heavy time commitments facing you at this time of year but I would be grateful if you would complete this questionnaire. I have enclosed a stamped, addressed envelope to ensure a speedy reply. Also, I have structured the questionnaire to enable you complete it in as short a time as possible. Should you be willing to participate further in the research project and are willing to discuss these issues in an interview setting please include your contact details or send them separately – e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie, Tel 087-938 5582 01-716 8269.

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

All questionnaire and interview responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and

there will be no identification of individual schools or teachers. The study will adhere

to the ethical code stipulated by UCD. Your participation in this research is voluntary

and I will be happy to answer any questions you have about your involvement, your

rights as a participant or the objectives and progress of the study.

As a token of my appreciation of your completing the questionnaire, I would like to

invite you to the official launch of the final report in due course. Please send your

contact details, either separately or added to the questionnaire, for inclusion on the guest

list.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Elizabeth O'Gorman

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Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 4 Reminder Letter Accompanying Questionnaire to Post-Primary Teachers



School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax 01-7161143

September 10th 2007

Re: Questionnaire on teachers' in-service requirements in SEN

Dear Colleague,

As you are aware I am carrying out research in the area of Learning Support / Special Education Needs. The working title of the investigation is:

'The professional development requirements of teachers working in the area of LS/SEN in primary and post primary schools'

In June, questionnaires relating to this research were sent to a number of schools. If you have completed and returned the questionnaire relating to this research, please disregard this letter. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in this research. If you have not had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire, I would be very grateful if you could take the time to fill it out and return it before **Friday 21**st **September**. All contributions to this research are highly valued. Your concerns are representative of teachers engaged in direct contact with students with special educational needs. As such, your opinions are fundamental to informing the content, structure, and delivery of the courses and programmes that are offered in the area of special education.

As a former teacher myself, I am aware of the heavy time commitments facing you at this time of year but I would be grateful if you would complete this questionnaire. I have enclosed a stamped, addressed envelope to ensure a speedy reply. Also, I have structured

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

the questionnaire to enable you complete it in as short a time as possible. Should you be willing to participate further in the research project and are willing to discuss these issues in an interview setting please include your contact details or send them separately – e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie, text 087-938 5582 or phone 01-716 8269.

All questionnaire and interview responses will be treated in the **strictest confidence** and there will be **no identification of individual schools or teachers**. The study will adhere to the ethical code stipulated by UCD. Your participation in this research is voluntary and I will be happy to answer any questions you have about your involvement, your rights as a participant or the objectives and progress of the study.

As a token of my appreciation of your completing the questionnaire, I would like to invite you to the official launch of the final report in due course. If you wish to attend, please send your contact details, either separately or added to the questionnaire, for inclusion on the guest list.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 5 Post-Primary Questionnaire

_	e following questions will faci pecial Educational Needs	litate the future development of in-service courses in PP		
Structure of ques	tionnaire: The Questions	are divided into 2 Sections		
1 General I	Information on Schools			
2 Professio	nal Development Needs o	f LS /SEN/Resource teachers		
Roles & F	Responsibilities of LS/SEN	N/Resource teachers		
Please refer to the	e current situation in your	school rather than an aspirational one! Thank		
you.				
Section 1 Backg	round Information	Middle socio-economic group		
Tick $\sqrt{\mathbf{all}}$ of the following that apply		Lower socio-economic group		
		City Suburbs		
Q1.1b School Ty	ype – Post-Primary	Town (under 10,000)		
Community Co	ollege	Town (over 10,000)		
Community Sc	hool	Rural community		
Comprehensive	e School	Inner city community		
Vocational Sch	ool	Travelling community		
Free Voluntary	Secondary School	(Approximate number)		
Fee-paying Vo	luntary Secondary	English as a second language community		
School		(Approximate number)		
Other		Students with Assessed Disabilities		
		(Approximate number)		
Q1.2 School cate	chment area; student	Q1.3 County		
intake profile. Ti	ck $\sqrt{\mathbf{all}}$ of the			
following that ap	ply	Q1.4 School Type		
Are there stude	nts from	Mainstream		
Upper socio-ecoi	nomic group	Special School		

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Disadvar	ntageo	d statı	ıs			
Other (Pl	lease	specit	fy)			
Mainstre	am w	ith sp	ecial	class		
Q1.5 Ap	-	imate	Nur	nber o	f stu	dents
	oys					
	irls		_			
Т	otal		(_)		
		_	_	_		
Q1.6 Ap						
	1	or Cycle	3	Semi	or Cycl	6
Streaming					+	
Mixed						
Ability						
Setting by subject						
Other			_		+	
(Please						
give						
details)						
Q1.7 Arc	o onv	of th	a fal	lowino	nro	aromn
Leaving	•				_	
Leaving					_	
- Junior C						
Junior Co				_		
Transitio						
Other						
Q1.8 Sta	ff / T	each	ers a	ssociat	ied w	ith SE
How man	ny fu	ll tim	e lear	rning s	uppo	rt/ resc

School of Education & Lifelong Learning UCD Questionnaire on Professional Development in

Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Approximately how many pa	rt-time learning su	ipport/ resource teachers or	teachers
with LS /Resource hours, are	there in your school	ol?	
Q1.8b			
Approximately how many stu	udents in total are in	n receipt of Learning Suppo	ort or
Resource either as an individ	ual or in a group _		
Q1.9 Approximately how ma	nny students have li	teracy or numeracy difficul	ties (or both)?
	Literacy	Numeracy	
None	, and the second		
Under 10%			
10%-25%			
26%-50%			
51%-75%			
76%-100%			
Q1.9b What is this opinion Standardised tests \Box Class	-	n? ecdotal evidence □	
Q1.10 School Planning for S	SEN		
Does the school have a writte	en policy on special	educational needs? Yes	No
Q1.10 b Tick which best des	cribes the organisat	ion of SEN provision in you	ur school
A written plan □			
Known established procedure	es 🗆		
Response to situations as the	y arise \square		

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q1.10 c How are students selected for additional help? Please tick procedures that are currently used in your schools and then choose the **4 most frequently** used. *Rank* the most frequently used method of selection as number 1, the next most frequently used method of selection as number 2, the third most frequently used as 3, and the fourth as 4.

	Additional Help Selection Procedures	Tick if used √	Rank 1-4
a	Recommendation of class teacher/ subject teacher		
b	Parental concern		
С	Below 10th percentile on in-school standardised test		
d	Learning support teacher's assessments		
e	Class based test		
f	Complaints of behavioural disruption to class		
g	Psychologist's report		
h	Entrance examinations		
Ι	(Secondary only) Primary school report		
j	Other (please describe)		

Comment			

Q1.11 Type of SEN provision in your school and frequency of use

- **A)** Tick which types of provision are available in your school. $\sqrt{}$
- B) Please pick 4 (or less) **frequently used** types of provision used for students with High Incidence Disability (e.g. Dyslexia; Borderline / Mild General Learning Difficulty) and *rank* the most frequently used type of provision as number 1, the next most frequently used as number 2, the third most frequently used as 3, and the fourth as 4

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

C) Please pick **4** (or less) **frequently used** types of provision used for students with Low Incidence Disability (e.g. Assessed Syndromes; Sensory-motor Disabilities; Autism) and *rank* the most frequently used type of provision as number 1, the next most frequently used as number 2, the third most frequently used as 3, and the fourth as 4

A B C

	Type of SEN provision in your school	Tick if	High	Low
		available	Incidence	Incidence
	(1 Most frequently used - 4 less frequently used)	,	Pick 1, 2,	Rank 1, 2,
		V	3,& 4 only	3,& 4 only
a	Mainstream class full time with withdrawal for individual			
	instruction			
b	Mainstream class with withdrawal for group instruction			
c	Mainstream class, supported by in-class team teaching,			
	with some withdrawal			
d	Mainstream class, supported by team teaching with no			
	withdrawal			
e	Mainstream class with occasional advice from resource			
	teacher			
f	Mainstream class part time, and special class part time			
g	Mainstream class with no additional support			
h	Mainstream class with support of visiting teacher			
I	Special class full time			
J	Team teaching			
k	Other, please specify			

Q1.12 If students are withdrawn for support pick 4 (or less) subjects/areas students are most frequently withdrawn from and rank them (Rank 1= subject most frequently withdrawn from, 2 = next most frequently withdrawn from, 3 = next and 4^{th}).

Subject	Rank		Rank	Subject	Rank	Subject	Rank
a) Irish		e) Geography		i) CSPE		m) Woodwork	
b) Religion		f) History		j) Foreign Language		n) Metalwork	
c) PE		g) Art		k) Practical subjects		o) Other 1	
d) English		h) Science		l) Maths		p) Other 2	

School of Education & Lifelong Learning UCD Questionnaire on Professional Development in

Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q1.13 Is there a member of staff with specific responsibility for the co-ordination of special needs provision in your school?
Q1.14 Are there procedures for determining how long LS /SEN support last for?
Q1.15 Who decides when support is terminated?
Q1.16 Are there specific criteria used to determine termination of support?
Q1.16b If yes, what are the criteria used? – general description
Q1.17 Do you have access to a NEPS psychologist? Yes No
Individual Education Plans
Q1.18 Does your school currently devise IEPS for students with SEN? Yes No
If yes please answer the following questions
Q1.18a Approximately how many IEPS were devised in the school this year?

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q1.18b Who was involved in developing the IEPS? PICK ONLY 4 (or fewer) people Please rank the people in order of the involvement they had in devising the IEPS

(1 = Most likely to be involved in developing IEPs)

Person	Most likely to be involved
	Pick 1, 2, 3 & 4 only
a) Principal	
b) Parents	
c) LS /Resource Teachers	
d) Pupils	
e) Class teacher	
f) Special Needs Assistant	
g) Class tutor	
h) Year head	
i) Psychologist	
j) Visiting teacher	
k) Other service	
l) Other professionals eg	-
m) Other (please specify)	

01.19	In	School	Su	pi	port
-------	----	---------------	----	----	------

Is there a group of teachers involved in a SEN support team?	Yes	No
--	-----	----

(If yes please rank four of the following people in order of the likelihood of their involvement in the support team according to current practice in your school. $(1 = Most \ likely - 4 = less \ likely$ to be involved in support team)

Please mark X If the post does not exist in your school

	Members of LS /SEN Support team ONLY PICK 4 people	Rank 1-4	X
a	Learning Support teachers		
b	Resource teachers		
С	Class teachers		
d	Home School Liaison teachers		
e	Career guidance		
f	Principal		
g	Vice principal		
h	Year head		
i	Class Tutor		
j	Subject teachers (specify area)		
k	Other (please specify)		

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Questionnaire on Professional Development in
Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

How often do these people meet	Daily □	Weekly □	Monthly \square	Other \square
Section TWO: My In-service / Pr	ofessional l	Development	needs in LS /	SEN
Q2				
(Tick which applies) Do you see yo	ourself prim	arily as a		
Learning Support teacher	Resource	/Special Educ	cation Needs to	eacher
Q2.1 What in-service /professional	developme	nt do you nee	d to carry out	your work as
a LS/Resource teacher effectively?	List your 4	most urgent i	n-service /prof	essional
development needs				
Q2.2 Have you ever had any in-ser	vice / profes	ssional develo	pment in the a	rea of
Learning Support /SEN Yes [□ No □			
Q2.3 Please indicate with a tick in	Column 1, a	all of the conte	exts you have	used for In-
Service and/or Professional Develo	pment			

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

In Column 2, Please PICK 4 contexts to indicate your **preference** for the delivery of Professional Development /In-Service and rank these 4 delivery contexts 1- 4 in order of preference. Give rank Number 1 to your most preferred context for course delivery, rank 2 = next most preferred, rank 3 = next preferred & 4

	Contexts for Professional Development in SEN	Tick if	Choose 4 Mark
		used	them 1,2 3,& 4
			in order of
			preference
a	Block release to attend a college / university programme		
b	Network meetings with other teachers working in the		
	field of SEN/Inclusion		
c	Opportunity to work with experienced colleague in		
	another school		
d	Opportunity to work with experienced colleague in your		
	own school		
e	SESS (Special Education Support Service) school based		
	support		
f	Local Education Centre course (out of school hours)		
g	Self selected further qualification in SEN (eg Diploma		
	or Masters)		
h	On-line/e-learning course		
i	Attending conferences (eg *ILSA #IATSE \(\) RAI)		
j	Summer course		
k	Dyslexia Association Course		
1	Teacher Union Courses in SEN		
m	Other (Please give details)		

^{*}ILSA Irish Learning Support Association

#IATSE Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education

∫ RAI Reading Association of Ireland

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.4 My in-service / professional development needs as a LS /SEN teacher

A) Rate the following components of possible LS/SEN teacher in-service course. In relation to **your needs** how important do you think each of the following is? Circle a number using the scale from 1-5 (1 most important - 5 least important)

B) Pick 10 (or less) key areas to be included in a course (Rank 1 = most important, 2 = next, etc.)

		\mathbf{A}	В
	My Professional Development Needs as an LS/SEN teacher	How	Key areas
		important	1, 2, 3,
		are they?	4,5,6, 7, 8,
		Rate 1-5	9 & 10
a	Psychological Development in Childhood	12345	
b	Psychological Development in Adolescence	12345	
c	Different Types of Learning Difficulty and their Characteristics	12345	
d	Assessment of Learning Difficulties	12345	
e	Interpreting Psychological Assessments	12345	
f	Sociology of Special Educational Needs	12345	
g	Philosophical Issues in Special Education	12345	
h	The Law and Special Educational Needs	12345	
i	School policy and planning in SEN	12345	
j	Working with parents of children with SEN	12345	
k	Developing skills in collaborating with other teachers	12345	
1	Developing alternative curriculum for Students with SEN	12345	
m	Teaching strategies for students with SEN	12345	
n	Teaching History Geography Science to Students with SEN	12345	
О	Teaching English as a second language	12345	
p	Social Skills Training	12345	
q	Health Education for Students with SEN	12345	
r	Language and Literacy for Students with SEN	12345	
s	Mathematics for Students with SEN	12345	
t	Developing materials for use with students with SEN	12345	
u	Speech and Language Therapy	12345	
v	Occupational Therapy	12345	
W	Behaviour Management	12345	
X	Information, Communication and Assistive Technology	12345	
у	Developing teachers' Computer Skills	12345	
z	Conducting Research in SEN	12345	
Λ	Developing an Education Plan for a student with SEN	12345	
Ξ	Access to other teachers working in the area of SEN	12345	
Σ	Access to Library facilities	12345	
Φ	Access to current journals	12345	
Ψ	Establishing links between special schools & mainstream schools	12345	
Ω	Admin and Record keeping	12345	
β	Inclusion of children with SEN into mainstream classes	12345	
γ	Student Peer-Collaborative Learning	12345	
θ	Teaching students from the travelling community	12345	
λ	Presentation Skills for giving in-service	12345	
	Other (please state & then rate)	12345	

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.5 My priorities for in-service professional development

- **A)** Tick which areas you would have an interest in pursuing for in-service/professional development.
- **B)** With reference to helping students in your school who have special educational needs arising from the following difficulties/ disabilities, rank, in order of preference, your 4 highest priorities in relation to LS/SEN in-service / professional development

Choose $\underline{4}$ only and rank 1-4 (1 = your highest priority for in-service; 2 = next highest priority, 3 = next highest priority and 4)

	My priorities for in-service /professional development	Tick if of interest $\sqrt{}$	Choose 4 only and rank (1= highest priority
a	Physical Difficulty,		
b	Hearing Impairment		
С	Visual Impairment		
d	Emotional Disturbance		
e	Behavioural problems		
f	Mild General Learning Disability		
g	Borderline Mild General Learning Disability		
h	Moderate General Learning Disability		
i	Severe-Profound General Learning Disability		
j	Specific Learning Disability: Dyspraxia		
k	Specific Learning Disability: Dyslexia		
1	Specific Learning Disability: Dyscalculia.		
m	Literacy Difficulties		
n	Numeracy Difficulties		
0	Assessed Syndromes: Autistic Spectrum Disorder		
p	Assessed Syndromes: Asperger		
q	Assessed Syndrome: Down		
r	Assessed Syndrome ADHD		
S	Chronic Illness Epilepsy		
t	Chronic illness (please specify)		
u	Speech and Language difficulty		
V	Students with English as a second language		
W	Students from the Travelling community		
X	Other (Please specify)		
Z			

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.6 What in your experience has proved to be the most effective method of developing your teaching skills?

Q2.7 Current Reality versus Ideal World! What are your major roles and responsibilities as an LS/SEN teacher in your school? Indicate the relative importance of the following possible aspects of your current workload in column A. In column B rate how important you think they ought to be.

Use the scale 1-5 (1 most important - 5 least important aspect of my job) A B

	My Roles and Responsibilities as an LS/SEN teacher	Currently how	Ideally
	in my school	important are	how
	·	they?	important
			should
			they be?
a	Withdrawal of students for individual instruction	12345	12345
b	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction	12345	12345
c	Collaborating with other teachers	12345	12345
d	Preparing resource and subject materials for	12345	12345
	differentiated in-class teaching		
e	Preparing resource and subject materials for	12345	12345
	individualised instruction		
f	Liaison with parents	12345	12345
g	Liaison with Principal on SEN issues	12345	12345
h	Record keeping	12345	12345
i	Report writing	12345	12345
j	Application for examination concessions	12345	12345
k	Application for subject exemptions	12345	12345
1	Identification of students with SEN	12345	12345
m	Administration of screening/diagnostic tests	12345	12345
n	Co-ordination of IEP meetings	12345	12345
0	Formulation of IEPs	12345	12345

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p	Implementation of IEPs	12345	12345
q	Review of IEPS	12345	12345
r	Monitoring of student progress	12345	12345
S	Re-assessment of student progress as appropriate	12345	12345
t	Timetabling of additional support for students with SEN	12345	12345
u	Co-ordination and allocation of SNA duties	12345	12345
v	Provision of substitute cover for absent colleagues	12345	12345
w	Formulation of school plan on Inclusion/SEN	12345	12345
Х	Implementation of school plan on Inclusion/SEN	12345	12345
у	Staff consultant on SEN issues	12345	12345
Z	Liaison with SENO (NCSE)	12345	12345
Λ	Liaison with psychological services	12345	12345
Ξ	Liaison with other external professionals (social workers,	12345	12345
	therapists etc)		
Σ	Liaison with Special Education Inspectorate	12345	12345
Φ	Liaison with feeder / follow-on schools	12345	12345
Ψ	Provision of staff development/in-service training	12345	12345
Ω	Team teaching for students with SEN	12345	12345
β	Other, (please add & then rate)	12345	12345
		12345	12345
		1	

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.9 In your school, which of the following groups have the greatest need for inservice/ professional development in LS /SEN? Choose 5 only and **Rank** them 1-5 (1 = highest priority, 2 = next highest priority, 3 = next highest priority 4 = next highest and 5 = lowest priority)

Group	Priority Rank 1-5
Learning Support teachers	
Resource teachers	
Special Needs assistants	
Principals	
Home School Liaison Teachers	
Pastoral care teacher	
Class teachers (if primary)	
Subject teachers (if secondary)	
Other please specify	
special needs /disability in your school?	
Q2.11 In your opinion what are the challeng special educational needs /disability in your	, •,
Q2.12 In your opinion, how supportive are t of including children with special educations	
Q2.14 Did you actively seek to become an LS	S /SEN teacher? Yes No

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.15 What motivates you to work in the area of LS /SEN?		
Q2.16 Please complete the following sentences. a) In Ireland the term 'Inclusion' is best understood as referring to		
b) In Ireland, the term 'Special Needs' is best understood as referring to		
Q2.18 Personal Information Female Male		
Number of years teaching experience Years experience in LS/SEN		
Initial Qualification		
Subject specialism		
LS / SEN qualification (if any)		
Final Question! Would you be willing to participate in an interview or focus group relating to in In-service / Professional Development Needs for teachers in LS/SEN? If you would like the opportunity to express your views and contribute to research in the area of LS/SEN please add your contact details here or send in separately.		
Elizabeth O'Gorman , Education Dept. SELL, Newman Building, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4 Tel. 01-7168269 Text 087-9385582 or e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie		

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Your time and commitment is much appreciated.

In recognition of your contribution to this research project I would like to invite you to the launch of the report in due course. Please contact me to let me know if you are interested in attending. Again, many thanks for your participation.

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 6 Letter Accompanying Questionnaire to Primary Teachers



School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax01-7161143

June 7th 2007

Dear Colleague,

Questionnaire on teachers' in-service requirements in SEN

I am carrying out research in the area of Learning Support / Special Education Needs. The working title of the investigation is:

'The professional development requirements of teachers working in the area of LS/SEN in primary and post primary schools'

I would appreciate it if you would complete the enclosed questionnaire as your input into this research would be invaluable. Your concerns are representative of teachers engaged in direct contact with students with special educational needs. As such, your opinions are fundamental to informing the content, structure, and delivery of the courses and programmes that are offered in the area of special education.

As a former teacher myself, I am aware of the heavy time commitments facing you at this time of year but I would be grateful if you would complete this questionnaire. I have enclosed a stamped, addressed envelope to ensure a speedy reply. Also, I have structured the questionnaire to enable you complete it in as short a time as possible. Should you be willing to participate further in the research project and are willing to

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

discuss these issues in an interview setting please include your contact details or send them separately - e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie, Tel 087-938 5582 01-716 8269.

All questionnaire and interview responses will be treated in the **strictest confidence** and there will be **no identification of individual schools or teachers**. The study will adhere to the ethical code stipulated by UCD. Your participation in this research is voluntary and I will be happy to answer any questions you have about your involvement, your rights as a participant or the objectives and progress of the study.

As a token of my appreciation of your completing the questionnaire, I would like to invite you to the official launch of the final report in due course. Please send your contact details, either separately or added to the questionnaire, for inclusion on the guest list.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 7 Reminder Letter Accompanying Questionnaire to Primary Teachers

Reminder!

Please reply before 19th October 2007

Questionnaire on LS/Resource/SEN teachers' in-service requirements

Dear Colleague,

I would very much appreciate your completing the enclosed questionnaire on the *Professional Development Requirements of LS/ Resource /SEN Teachers*.

This questionnaire offers teachers an opportunity to give voice to their opinions. The perspective of teachers on their professional development is important and in responding to this questionnaire you ensure that the research represent the concerns of all teachers.

I am aware of the heavy time commitments facing you at this time of year but I would be grateful if you would complete the questionnaire before **Oct.** 19th. I have structured the questionnaire to enable you complete it in as short a time as possible.

If you have already completed this questionnaire and its return has crossed with this reminder, may I take the opportunity to thank you for your input.

All questionnaire and interview responses will be treated in the **strictest confidence** and there will be **no identification of individual schools, principals or teachers**. The study will adhere to the ethical code stipulated by UCD. Your participation in this research is voluntary and I will be happy to answer any questions you have about your involvement, your rights as a participant or the objectives and progress of the study.

elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie, text 087-938 5582 or phone 01-716 8269.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 8 Questionnaire on Primary Teachers' In-Service Requirements in SEN

Your responses to the following questions will facilitate the future development of inservice courses in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Structure of questionnaire: Questions are divided into 2 Sections General Information on Schools Professional Development Needs and Roles & Responsibilities of 2 LS/SEN/Resource teachers Please refer to the current situation in your school rather than an aspirational one! Thank you. NB If you teach in more than one school, please refer to the school where you received this letter. **Section 1 Background Information** Lower socio-economic group City Suburbs Tick $\sqrt{\text{all that apply}}$ Town (under 10,000) Q1.1 School Type - Primary Town (over 10,000) National /Parish National/Religious Order _____ Rural community Gaelscoil Inner city community Multi-denominational Montessori Travelling community Private (Approximate number __) Other (Please specify) ___ English as a second language community (Approximate number) Q1.2 School catchment area; student Students with Assessed Disabilities intake profile. Tick $\sqrt{\mathbf{all}}$ of the following that apply (Approximate number Are there students from Q 1.3 County _____ Upper socio-economic group □ Q1.4 School Type Middle socio-economic group Mainstream

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Special School	
Mainstream with Sp	ecial Class
Disadvantaged statu	s
Other (please Specify)	
Q1.5 Approximate Nur	mber of
Boys	
Girls	
Total	()
Q1.6 Approach to scho	ool organisation
if relevant	
Streaming	
Mixed Ability	
Alphabetical	
Other	
(Please describe)	
Q1.7 Are there any of	the following
available in your school	9
FETAC qualifications	
Junior Certificate	
Other	

School of Education & Lifelong Learning UCD Questionnaire on Professional Development in

Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q1.8 Staff / Teachers asse	ociated with SEN	1	
How many full time Learn	ning Support/Reso	ource teachers are tl	here in your school?
Approximately how many	_	- 11	rce Teachers or teachers
with LS /Resource hours, a	are there in your s	CHOO1?	
Q1.8b			
Approximately how many	students in total a	re in receipt of Lea	arning Support or
Resource teaching either a	s an individual or	in a group	
Q1.9 Approximately how both)?	many students hav	ve literacy or nume	racy difficulties (or
0/0	Literacy	Numeracy	
None			
Under 10%			
10%-25%			
26%-50%			
51%-75%			
76%-100%			
Q1.9b What is this opinion	on primarily base Class tests	ed on?	evidence
Q1.10 School Planning fo	or SEN		
Does the school have a wr	itten policy on Spe	ecial Educational N	Needs? Yes No
Q1.10 b Tick which best d	lescribes the organ	nisation of SEN pro	ovision in your school
A written plan \square			
Known established proced	ures 🗆		

Response to situations as they arise \square

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q1.10 c How are students selected for additional help? Please tick procedures that are currently used in your schools and then choose the **4 most frequently** used. *Rank* the most frequently used method of selection as number 1, the next most frequently used method of selection as number 2, the third most frequently used as 3, and the fourth as 4.

	Additional Help Selection Procedures	Tick if used	Rank
			1-4
a	Recommendation of class teacher/ subject teacher		
b	Parental concern		
c	Below 10th percentile on in-school standardised test		
d	Learning support teacher's assessments		
e	Class based test		
f	Complaints of Behavioural Disruption to class		
g	Psychologist's report		
I	School report		
j	Other (please describe)		

Comment	 	 	

Q1.11 Type of SEN provision in your school

- **A)** Tick which types of provision are available in your school. $\sqrt{}$
- **B)** Please pick **4** (or less) **frequently used** types of provision used for students with <u>High Incidence Disability</u> (e.g. Dyslexia; Borderline / Mild General Learning Difficulty) and *rank* the most frequently used type of provision as number 1, the next most frequently used as number 2, the third most frequently used as 3, and the fourth as 4
- C) Please pick **4** (or less) **frequently used** types of provision used for students with Low Incidence Disability (e.g. Assessed Syndromes; Sensory-motor Disabilities; Autism) and *rank* the most frequently used type of provision as number 1, the next most frequently used as number 2, the third most frequently used as 3, and the fourth as 4

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

		A	В	C
	Type of SEN provision in your school	Tick if	High	Low
		available	Incidence Pick	Incidence 1-
	(1= Most frequently used - 4= less frequently used)	$\sqrt{}$	1, 2, 3,& 4	4 Pick 1, 2,
			only	3,& 4 only
a	Mainstream class full time with withdrawal for			
	individual instruction			
b	Mainstream class with withdrawal for group instruction			
c	Mainstream class, supported by in-class team teaching,			
	with some withdrawal			
d	Mainstream class, supported by team teaching with no			
	withdrawal			
e	Mainstream class with occasional advice from resource			
	teacher			
f	Mainstream class part time, and special class part time			
g	Mainstream class with no additional support			
h	Mainstream class with support of visiting teacher			
i	Special class full time			
j	Team teaching			
k	Other, please specify			_

Q1.12 If students are withdrawn for support pick 4 (or less) subjects/areas students are most frequently withdrawn from and rank them (Rank 1 = subject most frequently withdrawn from, 2 = next most frequently withdrawn from, 3 = next and 4^{th}).

Subject	Rank	Subject	Rank	Subject	Rank	Subject	Rank	Subject	Rank
a) Irish		c) PE		e) Geography		g) Art		l) Maths	
b) Religion		d) English		f) History		h) Science		0) Other 1	

Q1.13 Is there a member of staff with specific responsibility for the co-ordination of
special needs provision in your school?
Q1.14 How long does LS /SEN support last for? (term /years)
Q1.15 Who decides when support is terminated?
Q1.16 Are there specific criteria used to determine termination of support?

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q1.16b If yes, what are the criteria used? – gen	neral description
Q1.17 Do you have access to a NEPS psychological psycholog	ogist? Yes No
Q1.17b Do you have access to a Speech & Lan	nguage specialist? Yes No
Individual Education Plans	
Q1.18 Does your school currently devise IEPs	s for students with SEN? Yes No
If yes please answer the following questions	
Q1.18a Approximately how many IEPs were of	levised in the school this year?
Q1.18b 18b Who was involved in developing	the IEPs? PICK ONLY 4 (or fewer)
people	
Please rank the people in order of the involven	nent they had in devising the IEPs
(1 = Most likely to be involved in developing	g IEPs)
Person	Most likely to be involved 1, 2, 3 & 4 only
a) Principal	
b) Parents	
c) LS /Resource Teachers	
d) Pupils	
e) Class teacher	
f) Special Needs Assistant	
g) Class tutor	
h) Year head	
i) Psychologist	
j) Visiting teacher	
k) Other service	

1) Other professionals eg ___m) Other (please specify) __

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Questionnaire on Professional Development in
Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Ų.	1.19 In School Support			
Is	there a SEN support team? Yes No			
(If	f yes please rank four of the following peop	ple in order o	of the likel	ihood of their
in	volvement in the support team according to	o current pra	ctice in yo	our school. (1= Most
lik	sely - 4 = less likely to be involved in supplying the suppose supplying the supplying supplying the supplying supplying the supplying	ort team)		
Ρl	ease mark X If the post does not exist in yo	our school		
	Members of LS /SEN Support team	Rank	X]
		1-4		
a	Learning Support teachers			
b	D 4 1			
U	Resource teachers			
c	Class teachers			
c	Class teachers			
c d	Class teachers Home School Liaison teachers			
c d f	Class teachers Home School Liaison teachers Principal			

j	Subject teachers (specify area)				-	
k	Other (please specify)					
Но	ow often do these people meet	Daily □	We	ekly 🗆	Monthly □	Other

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Section TWO: My In-service / Professional Development needs in LS/SEN $\mathbf{Q2}$ (Tick which applies) Do you see yourself primarily as a Learning Support teacher Resource /Special Education Needs teacher Q2.1 What in-service /professional development do you need to carry out your work as a LS/Resource teacher effectively? List your 4 most urgent in-service /professional development needs Q2.2 Have you ever had any in-service / professional development in the area of Learning Support /SEN Yes □ No □ Q2.3 Please indicate with a tick in Column 1, all of the contexts you have used for In-Service and/or Professional Development in SEN In Column 2, Please PICK 4 contexts to indicate your **preference** for the delivery of Professional Development /In-Service and rank these 4 delivery contexts 1-4 in order of preference. Give rank Number 1 to your most preferred context for course delivery, rank 2 = next most preferred, rank 3 = next preferred & 4

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

	Contexts for Professional Development in SEN	Tick if	Choose 4 Mark
		used	them 1,2 3,& 4
			in order of
			preference
a	Block release to attend a college / university programme		
b	Network meetings with other teachers working in the field of		
	SEN/Inclusion		
С	Opportunity to work with experienced colleague in another school		
d	Opportunity to work with experienced colleague in your own		
	school		
e	SESS (Special Education Support Service) school based support		
f	Local Education Centre course (out of school hours)		
g	Self selected further qualification in SEN (eg Diploma or Masters)		
h	On-line/ e-learning course		
i	Attending conferences (eg *ILSA #IATSE ∫ RAI)		
j	Summer course		
k	Dyslexia Association Course		
1	INTO Courses in SEN		
m	Other (Please give details)		
n	DES Day release courses on Learning Support /SEN		

*ILSA Irish Learning Support Association
#IATSE Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education

§ RAI Reading Association of Ireland

Q2.4 My in-service / professional development needs as a LS /SEN teacher

A) Rate the following components of a possible programme of professional development for LS /SEN teachers. In relation to **your needs** how important do you think each of the following is? Circle a number using the scale from 1-5 (**1 most important** - **5 least important**)

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

B) Pick 10 (or less) key areas to be included in a course (Rank 1= most important, 2= next etc)

				A			В
	My Professional Development Needs as an LS/SEN teacher	I	low	im	por	tant	KEY
	•				ney'		areas 1, 2,
			R	ate	1-5		3, 4,5,6, 7,
							8, 9,& 10
a	Psychological Development in Childhood	1	2	3	4	5	
b	Psychological Development in Adolescence	1	2	3	4	5	
С	Different Types of Learning Difficulties and their Characteristics	1	2	3		5	
d	Assessment of Learning Difficulties	1	2	3			
e	Interpreting Psychological Assessments	1	2	3	4	5	
f		1	2	3	4	5	
g	Philosophical Issues in Special Education	1	2	3	4	5	
h	The Law and Special Educational Needs	1	2	3	4	5	
i	School policy and planning in SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
j	Working with parents of children with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
k	Developing skills in collaborating with other teachers	1	2	3	4	5	
1	Developing alternative curriculum for Students with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
n	Teaching strategies for students with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
n	Teaching History Geography Science to Students with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
0	Teaching English as a second language	1	2	3	4	5	
p		1	2	3	4	5	
q	Health Education for Students with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
r	Language and Literacy for Students with SEN	1	2	3		5	
S	Mathematics for Students with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
t	Developing materials for use with students with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
u		1	2	3	4	5	
v		1	2	3		5	
W		1	2	3	4	5	
X	-	1	2	3		5	
У	Developing teachers' Computer Skills	1	2	3	4	5	
Z		1	2	3		5	
Λ	Developing an Education Plan for a student with SEN	1	2	3	4	5	
Ξ		1	2	3	4		
Σ	-	1	2	3		5	
Φ	*	1	2	3	4	5	
Ч	<u> </u>	1	2	3			1
Ω		1	2	3			1
β		1	2	3			1
γ	Student Peer-Collaborative Learning	1	2	3			
θ		1	2	3			
λ		1	2	3			
H	Other (please state & then rate)	1	2	3			
	- · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	1 -	_	_		_	1

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.5 My priorities for in-service professional development

- **A)** Tick which areas you would have an interest in pursuing for in-service/professional development.
- **B)** With reference to helping students in your school who have special educational needs arising from the following difficulties/ disabilities, rank, in order of preference, your 4 highest priorities in relation to LS/SEN in-service / professional development

Choose 1-4 (1 = your highest priority for in-service)

	My priorities for in-service /professional	Tick if of	Choose 4 only
	development in SEN	interest √	and rank (1= highest priority)
a	Physical Difficulty,		
b	Hearing Impairment		
С	Visual Impairment		
d	Emotional Disturbance		
e	Behavioural problems		
f	Mild General Learning Disability		
g	Borderline Mild General Learning Disability		
h	Moderate General Learning Disability		
i	Severe-Profound General Learning Disability		
j	Specific Learning Disability: Dyspraxia		
k	Specific Learning Disability: Dyslexia		
1	Specific Learning Disability: Dyscalculia.		
m	Literacy Difficulties		
n	Numeracy Difficulties		
0	Assessed Syndromes: Autistic Spectrum Disorder		
p	Assessed Syndromes: Asperger's		
q	Assessed Syndrome: Down's		
r	Assessed Syndrome: ADHD		
S	Chronic Illness Epilepsy		
t	Chronic illness (please specify)		
u	Speech and Language difficulty		
V	Students with English as a second language		
W	Students from the Travelling community		
X	Other (Please specify)		
Z			

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.6 What in your experience has proved to be the most effective method of developing your teaching skills?

Q2.7 Current Reality versus Ideal World! What are the major roles and responsibilities of the LS/SEN teacher in your school?

Indicate the relative importance of the following possible aspects of your current workload in column **A**. In column **B** rate how important you think they ought to be. Use the scale 1-5 (1 most important -5 least important aspect of job)

		A	В
	Roles and responsibilities of LS/SEN teachers	Currently how	Ideally how
	-	important are	important
		they?	should they be?
a	Withdrawal of students for individual instruction	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
b	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
С	Collaborating with other teachers	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
d	Preparing resource and subject materials for differentiated in-	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	class teaching		
e	Preparing resource and subject materials for individualised	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	instruction		
f	Liaison with parents	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
g	Liaison with Principal on SEN issues	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
h	Record keeping	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
i	Report writing	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
j	Application for examination concessions	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
k	Tr ·····	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
1	Identification of students with SEN	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
m	Administration of screening/diagnostic tests	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
n	Co-ordination of IEP meetings	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
0	Formulation of lEPs	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
p	Implementation of lEPs	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
q	Review of IEPS	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
r	Monitoring of student progress	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
S	Re-assessment of student progress as appropriate	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
t	Timetabling of additional support for students with SEN	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
u	Co-ordination and allocation of SNA duties	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
v	Provision of substitute cover for absent colleagues	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
W		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
X	Implementation of school plan on Inclusion/SEN	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
у	Staff consultant on SEN issues	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Z		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Λ	Liaison with psychological services	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
[I]	Liaison with other external professionals (social workers,	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	therapists etc)		
Σ	Liaison with Special Education Inspectorate	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	Liaison with feeder / follow-on schools	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Ψ	Provision of staff development/in-service training	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	Team teaching for students with SEN	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
β	Other, (please add & then rate)	1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
		1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2. 9 In your school, which of the following groups have the greatest need for inservice/ professional development in LS /SEN? Choose 5 only and **Rank** them 1-5 (1 = highest priority, 2 = next highest priority, 3 = next highest priority, 4 = next highest and 5 = lowest priority)

Group	Priority Rank 1-5
Learning Support	
Resource teachers	
Special Needs Assistants	
Principals	
Home School Liaison Teacher	
Pastoral care teacher	
Class teachers (if primary)	
Subject teacher (if secondary)	
Other please specify	

Q2.10 In your opinion what are the benefits, if any, of including children with special needs in your school?
Q2.11 In your opinion what are the challenges, if any, of including children with special educational needs in your school?
Q2.12 In your opinion, how supportive are the majority of the staff in your school
of including children with special educational needs?

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Questionnaire on Professional Development in
Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q2.14 Did you actively seek to become an LS /SEN teacher? Yes No
Q2.15 What motivates you to work in the area of LS /SEN?
Q2.16 Please complete the following sentences.
a) In Ireland the term 'Inclusion' is best understood as referring to
b) In Ireland, the term 'Special Needs' is best understood as referring to
O2 18 Dawsanal Information
Q2.18 Personal Information Female Male
Number of years teaching experienceYears experience in LS/SEN
Initial Qualification
LS/ SEN qualification (if relevant)
Final Question! Would you be willing to participate in an interview or focus group
relating to in In-service / Professional Development Needs for teachers in LS/SEN? If
you would like the opportunity to express your views and contribute to research in the area of LS/SEN please add your contact details here or send them in separately to:
Elizabeth O'Gorman , Education Dept. SELL, Newman Building, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4 Tel. 01-7168269 Text 087-9385582 or e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Your time and commitment are very much appreciated.

In recognition of your contribution to this research project I would like to invite you to the launch of the report in due course. Use the contact details above or add your name here to let me know if you are interested in attending. Again, many thanks for your participation.

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 9 Letter Accompanying Questionnaire to Principals



School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax01-7161143

LS/Resource/SEN teachers' in-service requirements

Dear Principal,

The perspective of principals on the professional development of their staff is critically important and should be an integral part of deliberations on teacher education.

I am carrying out research for UCD/NCSE in the area of professional development in Learning Support/Special Education Needs with a specific focus on the identification of teachers' in-service requirements. Through this research, I offer principals and teachers the opportunity to give voice to their opinions and am conducting a survey with a view to gathering feedback on teacher professional development in LS/Resource/SEN.

In relation to the enclosed principal's questionnaire, I would appreciate **your insight** into what you regard as the most urgent professional development requirements of LS/Resource/SEN teachers and also seek your opinion on other SEN related issues. Your input as a principal is highly valued in the current changing environment of inclusion and special needs. Your concerns are representative of principals engaged in direct contact with students with special educational needs. For this reason, your opinions are an essential contribution to professional development in the area of special education.

I am aware of the heavy time commitments facing you at this time of year but I would be grateful if you would complete the questionnaire before **Oct.** 19th. I have structured the questionnaire to enable you complete it in as short a time as possible. Should you be willing to participate further in the research project and are willing to discuss these

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

issues in an interview setting please include your contact details or send them separately – e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie, text 087-938 5582 or phone 01-716 8269.

All questionnaire and interview responses will be treated in the **strictest confidence** and there will be **no identification of individual schools, principals or teachers**. The study will adhere to the ethical code stipulated by UCD. Your participation in this research is voluntary and I will be happy to answer any questions you have about your involvement, your rights as a participant or the objectives and progress of the study.

As a token of my appreciation of your completing the questionnaire, I would like to invite you to the official launch of the final report in due course. If you wish to attend, please send your contact details, either separately or added to the questionnaire, for inclusion on the guest list.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Elizabeth O'Gorman

This research is part funded by the National Council for Special Education

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 10 Letter Accompanying Questionnaire to Principals with Reminder for Teachers



School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax 01-716-1143

LS/Resource/SEN teachers' in-service requirements

Dear Principal,

The perspective of principals on the professional development of their staff is critically important and should be an integral part of deliberations on teacher education.

I am carrying out research in the area of professional development in Learning Support / Special Education Needs with a specific focus on the identification of teachers' in-service requirements. In conducting this research, I offer principals and teachers the opportunity to give voice to their opinions and I enclose questionnaires with a view to gathering feedback on teacher professional development in LS/Resource/SEN.

In relation to the principal's questionnaire, I would appreciate **your insight** into what you regard as the most urgent professional development requirements of LS/Resource/SEN teachers and also seek your opinion on other SEN related issues. Your input as a principal is highly valued in the current changing environment of inclusion and special needs. Your concerns are representative of principals engaged in direct contact with students with special educational needs. For this reason, your opinions are an essential contribution to professional development in the area of special education.

I am aware of the heavy time commitments facing you at this time of year but I would be grateful if you would complete the questionnaire before **Oct.** 19th. I have structured the questionnaire to enable you complete it in as short a time as possible. Should you be willing to participate further in the research project and are willing to discuss these issues in an interview

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

setting please include your contact details or send them separately – e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie, text 087-938 5582 or phone 01-716 8269.

In relation to the teacher's questionnaire, I would be very grateful if you would **remind** the main Learning Support/Resource/SEN teacher/coordinator to complete the questionnaire which was sent in September. I enclose an additional copy of the questionnaire and stamped addressed envelope so as to ensure a speedy reply. If the completed questionnaire has crossed with this reminder, may I take the opportunity to thank your staff for their input.

All questionnaire and interview responses will be treated in the **strictest confidence** and there will be **no identification of individual schools, principals or teachers**. The study will adhere to the ethical code stipulated by UCD. Your participation in this research is voluntary and I will be happy to answer any questions you have about your involvement, your rights as a participant or the objectives and progress of the study.

As a token of my appreciation of your completing the questionnaire, I would like to invite you to the official launch of the final report in due course. If you wish to attend, please send your contact details, either separately or added to the questionnaire, for inclusion on the guest list.

Thank you for your participation in this research.

Elizabeth O'Gorman

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 11 Principals' Questionnaire

Your responses to the following questions will contribute to the design of professional development/in-service courses for LS/Resource/SEN teachers

Structure of questionnaire: There are 12 questions. 1-6 relate to your perceptions as a principal of the Professional Development Needs of LS/Resource/SEN teachers

Questions 6-12 relate to your opinions of aspects of special educational needs and the roles & responsibilities of LS/resource/SEN teachers

Q1 In your school, which of the following groups have the greatest need for inservice/professional development in the area of LS /SEN? Choose 5 only and **Rank** them 1-5 (1 = highest priority, 2 = next highest priority, 3 = next priority etc)

Group	Priority Rank 1-5
Learning Support teachers	
Resource teachers	
Special Needs Assistants	
Principal	
Home School Liaison Teachers	
Pastoral care teacher	
Class teachers (if primary)	
Subject teachers (if secondary)	
Other please specify	

Q2 In relation to **LS/Resource/SEN teachers** participating in professional development, please PICK 4 contexts to indicate what you consider the most valuable opportunities for them to develop knowledge & skills. Please **rank** these 5 delivery contexts 1- 5 in order of preference. Give rank Number 1 to the most preferred context for course delivery, rank $\mathbf{2} = \text{next}$ most preferred, rank $\mathbf{3} = 3^{\text{rd}}$ preference, $\mathbf{4} = 4^{\text{th}}$ preference & $\mathbf{5} = 5^{\text{th}}$ preference

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Questionnaire on Professional Development in
Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

	Contexts for Professional Development in SEN for	Choose 4 & rank
	LS/Resource/SEN	1,2 3,& 4 in order
		of preference
A	Block release to attend a college / university programme	
В	Network meetings with other teachers working in the field of	
	SEN/Inclusion	
С	Opportunity to work with experienced colleague in another school	
D	Opportunity to work with experienced colleague in own school	
Е	SESS (Special Education Support Service) school based support	
F	Local Education Centre course (out of school hours)	
G	Self selected further qualification in SEN (eg Diploma or Masters)	
Н	On-line/ e-learning course	
I	Attending conferences (eg *ILSA **IATSE ***RAI)	
J	Summer course	
K	Dyslexia Association Course	
L	Teacher Union Courses in SEN	
M	Other (Please give details)	
*ILS	A Irish Learning Support Association	
**IA	TSE Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education	
***R	AI Reading Association of Ireland	
_	Has your school had any whole school in-service/professional detorion of Learning Support/Special Educational Needs for all staff? Yes	-
	In your opinion in what areas do the LS/Resource/SEN teacher	•
_	ire in-service /professional development? List a maximum of the	ir 4 most urgent in-
servi	ice /professional development needs	

School of Education & Lifelong Learning UCD

Questionnaire on Professional Development in
Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q5 In your experience , what has proved to be the most effective method for LS/SEN
teachers' to develop the knowledge and skills to carry out their role?
Q6 In your opinion what are the benefits, if any, of including children with special
needs/disability in your school?
Q7 In your opinion what are the challenges, if any, of including children with
special educational needs/disability in your school?

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q8 In your opinion what are the major roles and responsibilities of main LS/SEN teacher/co-ordinator in your school? Indicate the relative importance of the following possible aspects of their current workload in column A. In column B rate how important you think they ought to be.

		A I	3
	Roles and Responsibilities of LS/Resource/SEN teachers	Currently how	Ideally
	in my school	important are	how important
		they?	should they be?
	Withdrawal of students for individual instruction	12345	12345
1	Withdrawal of students for small group instruction	12345	12345
	Collaborating with other teachers	12345	12345
	Preparing resource and subject materials for differentiated in-class teaching	12345	12345
;	Preparing resource and subject materials for individualised instruction	12345	12345
	Liaison with parents	12345	12345
	Liaison with Principal on SEN issues	12345	12345
Ī	Record keeping	12345	12345
1	Report writing	12345	12345
1	Application for examination concessions	12345	12345
	Application for subject exemptions	12345	12345
	Identification of students with SEN	12345	12345
ı	Administration of screening/diagnostic tests	12345	12345
1	Co-ordination of IEP meetings	12345	12345
	Formulation of lEPs	12345	12345
,	Implementation of IEPs	12345	12345
ı	Review of IEPS	12345	12345
Ī	Monitoring of student progress	12345	12345
Ī	Re-assessment of student progress as appropriate	12345	12345
1	Timetabling of additional support for students with SEN	12345	12345
1	Co-ordination and allocation of SNA duties	12345	12345
1	Provision of substitute cover for absent colleagues	12345	12345
7	Formulation of school plan on Inclusion/SEN	12345	12345
1	Implementation of school plan on Inclusion/SEN	12345	12345
Ī	Staff consultant on SEN issues	12345	12345
	Liaison with SENO (NCSE)	12345	12345
1	Liaison with psychological services	12345	12345
	Liaison with other external professionals (social workers, therapists etc)	12345	12345
į	Liaison with Special Education Inspectorate	12345	12345
)	Liaison with feeder / follow-on schools	12345	12345
ſ	Provision of staff development/in-service training	12345	12345
)	Team teaching for students with SEN	12345	12345
4	Other, (please add & then rate)	12345	12345

12345

12345

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Q9 Please comp	lete the followin	ng sentences. Write down your first thoughts.
a) In Ireland the	e term 'Inclusio	n' is best understood as referring to
b) In Ireland, th	ne term 'Special	Needs' is best understood as referring to
Q 11 In your op	oinion, how supp	portive are the majority of the staff in your school of
including childr	en with special	educational needs /disability?
		
Q 12 Personal I	nformation	
Female	Male	Years teaching experience
If you have any q	queries regardin _s	g this questionnaire please contact
Elizabeth O'Gorr	man, Education D	ept. SELL, Newman Building, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4
Tel. 01-7168269 T	Γext 087-9385582	or e-mail elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Your time and commitment are much appreciated.

In recognition of your contribution to this research project I would like to invite you to the launch of the report in due course. Please contact me to let me know if you are interested in attending. Again, many thanks for your participation.

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 12 Invitation to Participate Further in the Research Project



School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax 01-716-1143

Thank you for your interest in this research.

My name is Elizabeth O'Gorman. I am a teacher on secondment to the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at University College Dublin. I am conducting research on the *Professional Development Requirements* of teachers working with students with Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools. I would like to include the views of a wide range of stakeholders as part of this research. I hope to interview a number of personnel from various organisations and institutions involved. If you are willing to consider participating in the research, please reply by phone, e-mail or post to:

elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie Elizabeth O'Gorman

Tel 01-7168269 or 087-9385582 School of Education and Lifelong Learning
Belfield
Dublin 4

Details on the proposed research

If you opt to contribute, you will be participating in an interview which will last for half an hour approximately. You will be asked some questions about the roles and responsibilities of LS/RT/SEN teachers working in the area and their professional development requirements. With your permission, the interview will be tape recorded. Although <u>audiotapes</u> will be used during the discussion, your name and other identifiable information will not be used and will be kept confidential. After this research is completed, I may save the tape recordings and my notes for the purpose of future research but I will ensure secure storage and maintain the confidentiality of the materials at all times. There is no monetary benefit to you from participating in the discussion; however, the research will benefit the teaching profession and participants will be invited to the launch of the final report.

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to refuse to answer any questions without giving a reason. Please take time to consider whether you want to contribute to this research or not. If you have any questions about the research feel free to telephone me, Elizabeth, at 01-7168269/087-9385582 or contact me by e-mail (above).

In accordance with the UCD ethics committee regulations, all participants in research projects are asked to indicate that they have been informed of the nature of the research and that they have agreed to participate. To this end, participants are asked to sign a letter of 'informed consent'. If you agree to take part in the research, please sign below and keep one copy of this information for your future reference.

I have read this consent form and have had time to consider whether to take part in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. I understand that, as part of this research project, audiotapes of my participation in the research will be made. I understand that my name will not be identified in any use of these records. I am voluntarily agreeing that the audiotapes may be studied by the research team for use in the research project and that the information gathered through this process may be used in education journals and other publications. I agree to take part in this research.

Name of Participant (in block letters)		
Signature	Date	

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 13 Principal Interview Schedule



University College Dublin
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax01-7161143

Research on Professional Development for Teachers Working in the Area of SEN in Mainstream Schools

Interview Schedule

These are the	issues that	will be rais	sed but the	e wording	and	sequence	may	vary to	suit
the different of	contexts.								

the different contexts.			
Principal Interview: M/F			
Primary /Post-primary	Rural /Urban	Date	
Greetings and thanks for a	greeing to be interv	riewed	
1. Can you tell me about	the Special Education	onal Needs situation in you	ır school?
(Possible Prompts: Approx. educational needs? Around l	•		•
there in your school? And pa	art-time LS/RT teach	ers? What about SNAs?)	
StudentsLS/RT Teach	ners FTLS/RT	Teachers PT SNAs	

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

- 2. What are the major roles and responsibilities of the LS/Resource teacher?
- 3. What skills and knowledge are needed to carry out the role of an LS/RT teacher? (prompt to ensure working with SNAs and collaborating with colleagues is included; also using ICT)
- 4. What are the greatest challenges facing the LS/RT? (prompt to ensure working with SNAs and collaborating with colleagues is included)
- 5. What in-service / professional development programmes /courses are you aware of in the area of Learning Support /SEN?

Prompts Types of courses: DES provided; 3rd Level Institutes, year long full-time; part-time; daylong; weekend; evening; education centres; on-line.

- 6. Have your LS/RT staff participated in professional development courses?
- 7. If yes how have teachers benefiting from the courses in SEN they attended?
- 8. What (further) Professional Development do LS/RT teachers need to carry out their roles and responsibilities as LS/SEN teachers?
- 9. What have you found to be the best way for staff to develop their teaching skills?

Prompt: Consider working with experienced colleagues; attending in-service; from books and materials; research articles in journals; post graduate qualifications in teaching; trying out new ideas from on-line sources; attending self selected courses in education centres; DES provided in-service etc.

10. In your school what kind of methodologies have you found to be useful in working with pupils with SEN? – (prompt to include collaboration with colleagues; assistive technology)

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

- 11. In relation to your school and the students who have special educational needs, what are the schools' highest priorities for LS/SEN in-service / professional development?
- 12. Where do you go /who do you turn to when there are difficulties with pupils with SEN?
- 13. What do you think the benefits and challenges are of including children with special needs /disability in your school?
- 14. How would you describe the attitude of the majority of staff in your school towards the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs /disability?
- 15. How was the LS/Resource teacher selected for the post? Interview? Self-selection? What were the deciding factors in appointing the person to LS /resource?
- 16. How do you think the role of a LS/RT teacher is perceived by other teachers in the school
- 17. In what way would you expect teachers to adapt their teaching when working in the area of resource/ learning support?
- 18. What does the term 'Inclusion' mean to you?
- 19. What, in your opinion, does the term 'special needs' refer to?

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

Appendix 14 Telephone Interview Schedule



Interview Schedule

School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax01-7161143

Date

Research on Professional Development for Teachers Working in the Area of SEN in Mainstream Schools

	esee are the issues that will be raised but the wording, sequence and number of estions will vary to suit the different contexts.
Gı	reetings and thanks for agreeing to be interviewed
In	terview Preamble
inp an	ank you for agreeing to the interview. I appreciate your participation in this research. Your out will be valuable. Firstly, I must comply with the university ethics committee regulations d record your consent to be interviewed. If you are happy to take part in the research can I k you to respond 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions.
1.	Are you aware of the nature of the research?
2.	Have you had sufficient time to consider whether to take part in this study?
<i>3</i> .	Do you understand that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw from the research at any time?
4 .	Do you agree that, as part of this research project, audiotapes of your participation in the research will be made?
5.	Do you understand that your name will not be identified in any use of these records?

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

6. Do you voluntarily agree that the audiotapes may be studied by the research team for use in the research project and that the information gathered through this process may be used in education journals and other publications and presented at conferences? ___ (Additional information to be given as required) Thank you for your consent. The areas I hope to cover are changes in SEN in Ireland, SEN policy, To begin can we talk a little about the changes in the area of Special Education in Ireland in recent years? 1. Can you tell me about the most significant changes in recent years in Special Educational Needs in mainstream Primary & Post-primary schools? 2. What do you feel are the most important aspects of DES policy in relation to students with SEN in mainstream Primary & Post-Primary schools? 3. In your opinion, how supportive of including students with SEN are mainstream Primary & Post schools? 4. At primary level what are the functions/responsibilities of the LS teacher? 5. At primary level what are the functions/responsibilities of the RT/SEN teacher? 6. At post -primary level what are the functions/responsibilities of the LS teacher? 7. At post-primary level what are the functions/responsibilities of the Resource teacher?

8. What are the greatest challenges facing the LS/RT teacher?

Questionnaire on Professional Development in Learning Support/Special Educational Needs

- 9. What are the main skill and knowledge areas LS /RT teachers need to carry out their roles?
- 10. What type of in-service / professional development programmes /courses can best provide the requisite skill and knowledge areas?
- 11. What benefits do you see for teachers participating in such courses in SEN /Inclusion?
- 12. What benefits do you see for schools in supporting teachers participating in such courses in SEN /Inclusion?
- 13. What (further) Professional Development do LS/RT teachers need to carry out their roles and responsibilities as LS/SEN teachers?
- 14. What have you found to be the best way for LS/SEN teachers to develop their teaching skills?
- 15. In your experience, what kinds of methodologies have proved to be useful in working with pupils with SEN?
- 16. In relation to your experience, what are the schools' highest priorities for LS/SEN in-service / professional development?
- 17. What options are open to teachers and principals when there are difficulties with pupils with SEN?
- 18. How do you think the role of a LS/RT teacher is perceived by other teachers in the school?
- 19. Are there any other insights / comments you would like to add?

Many thanks for your contribution.

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Appendix 15 Invitation to Parent Focus Group

Parents of children with Special Educational Needs Group Discussion

Thank you for your interest in this discussion group.

My name is Elizabeth O'Gorman. I am a teacher currently working in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at University College Dublin. I am doing some research on *Teachers' Roles, Responsibilities & Professional Development Requirements*. The main focus is on mainstream Learning Support and Resource teachers working with students who have special educational needs. I would like to include the views of parents as part of this research.

If you are interested in participating in the research you would be asked to join in a discussion with other parents. The aim of this discussion group is to get feedback from parents on different aspects of the education system. Parents are asked to speak about the general experience rather than specific experience with individual schools or teachers.

Parents are given a short list of questions to discuss among themselves. The areas include what they see as the main challenges facing their children in mainstream schools. Parents then have a conversation about how schools can best help their children. This is followed by a discussion on the roles and responsibilities of the Learning Support/Resource Teachers who have contact with children who have special educational needs. Parents will then talk about the training they feel teachers should be given so that they can best help the children. Overall, the discussion should take less than an hour.

To ensure that the points raised are noted accurately, there will be an audio recording of the discussion but it will be completely anonymous and there will be no way of identifying the speakers or matching names to voices.

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If you would like to participate you are very welcome to come to:		
On	At:	
Tea and coffee will be provided.		

UCD is keen to ensure that any person participating in such discussion groups is aware that they are contributing to a research project. Therefore, each participant in the group will be asked to sign a form to indicate that they realise the discussion is for research purposes and that they are happy with that. I may save the tape recordings and my notes for the purpose of future research but I will ensure secure storage and maintain the confidentiality of the materials at all times.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Please take time to consider whether you want to take part in this research or not. If you have any questions about the research at any time feel free to telephone me, Elizabeth, at 01-7168269 /087-9385582 or contact me by e-mail: elizabeth.ogorman@ucd.ie.

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Appendix 16 Parent Focus Group Information

Parents Focus Group – 2008

Research Focus Group

Thank you for participating in this research project. I am exploring the area of special education in mainstream schools. I am particularly looking at the work teachers do with students who have special educational needs and the training they need to carry out this work. As part of this research, I would like to include the views of parents who have

children with special educational needs attending mainstream schools.

The aim of this discussion group is to get feedback from parents on different aspects of the education system. Parents are asked to speak about the general experience

rather than specific experience with individual schools or teachers.

During the next hour, parents are asked to talk among themselves about what they see as

the main challenges facing their children in mainstream schools. Parents are then asked

to have a conversation about how schools can best help their children. This would be

followed by a discussion on the roles and responsibilities of the Learning Support /

Resource Teachers who have contact with children who have special educational needs.

Parents will then talk about the training they feel teachers should be given so that they

can best help the children. Overall, the discussion should take about an hour.

First, to ensure that everyone knows about and is happy to participate in the research I

would ask each participant in the group to sign and fill in the informed consent form.

Please ensure everyone fills in the details on the form. Thank you.

(Name; Signature; Female/Male; School; Rural/Urban; Primary/Post primary)

Secondly the discussion. For each key question allow each person in the group to speak

once before anyone makes a second comment. When everyone has had their say, feel free

to add other comments and opinions and follow it with a general discussion on the topic.

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(ie each member of the group must speak once before a second comment is offered by anyone).

To ensure that the points raised are noted accurately, there will be an audio recording of the discussion but it will be completely anonymous and there will be no way of identifying the speakers or matching names to voices.

Third and finally, if time allows, at the end of the three discussions please agree on and note the two most important points for each of key questions on the report sheet provided.

I would appreciate it if you could allow each person to finish speaking before interrupting – it makes it easier to take notes later!

For each of the questions allow each person in the group to speak once before anyone makes a second comment. When everyone has had their say, feel free to add other comments and opinions and follow it with a general discussion on the topic (ie each member of the group must speak once before a second comment is offered by anyone).

Allow 5-10 minutes for each of the questions

Questions

- Q1 What are main challenges facing children with special needs in mainstream school?
- Q2 How can schools best help children with special needs?
- Q4 How do you see the role of the SEN teacher in the school?
- Q3 How can SEN teachers best help children with special needs?
- Q5 What type of training do you think teachers should be given so that they can best help children with special needs?
- O6 What is the best way for teachers to access this extra training?
- Q7 How would you like to be able to liaise with the school?

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Additional Questions if time

Q8 How do you see the role of the Principal in a mainstream school with students with SEN?

Q9 What do you consider to be the most important service the school could offer you as a parent of a student with SEN?

Q10 How, in your opinion, can SEN teachers help parents of students with SEN?

Q11 What would you consider to be, in your own opinion, an ideal relationship between the school and parents of students with SEN?

If there is time at the end of the discussion, please agree on and note the two most important points for each of the questions, on the report sheet provided.

Thank you most sincerely for your participation in this discussion.

Your comments will be invaluable in this research.

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Appendix 17 Parent Focus Group Feedback Form

Group Feedback Form

Parent of Primary Child Post-Primary Child
(Office group or Main Room group)
At the end of the group discussion please agree on and write down the two most important points for each of the 7 questions.
Q1 What are the main challenges facing children with special needs in mainstream school?
Q2 How can schools best help children with special needs?
Q3 How do you see the role of the SEN teacher in the school?

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Q4 How can SEN teachers best help children with special needs?		
Q5 What type of training do you think teachers should be given so that they can best help children with special needs?		
Q6 What is the best way for teachers to access this extra training?		
Q7 How would you like to be able to liaise with the school?		
Additional Questions if time Q8 How do you see the role of the Principal in a mainstream school with students with SEN?		

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Q9 What do you consider to be the most important service the school could offer		
you as a parent of a student with SEN?		
Q10 How, in your opinion, can SEN teachers help parents of students with SEN		
\mathbf{Q} 11 What would you consider to be, in your own opinion, and ideal relationship		
between the school and parents of students with SEN?		

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Appendix 18 Teacher Focus Group Information

Teacher Focus Group – Schedule

Research Focus Group Guidelines

The aim of this discussion group is to get feedback from teachers on **their** professional development needs. In accordance with UCD's ethical procedures each participant in the group must **sign and fill in the informed consent form.**

Please ensure everyone fills in the details on the form. Thank you.

(Name; Signature; Female/Male; School; Rural/Urban; Primary/Post primary; Teaching experience; SEN/LS experience)

Check you are at the correct table – primary or post primary!

<u>For each key question</u> conduct a 'round robin' and follow it with a general discussion on the topic (ie each member of the group must speak once before a second comment is offered by anyone).

Allow 5 minutes for each key question

- Q1 What are the greatest challenges facing you as an LS/R teacher?
- **Q2** What type of support professional development do you need to meet these challenges?
- **Q3** What is the best way for you to access this support/professional development?

At the end of the three discussions please agree on and note the two most important points for each of the key questions on the report sheet provided.

Thank you most sincerely for your participation in this discussion.

Your comments will be invaluable in this research.

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Appendix 19 Teacher Focus Group Feedback Form

Group Feedback Form

Primary Post-Primary
Session (A or B)
Table (1 or 2)
At the end of the group discussion please agree on and write down the two most important points for each of the key questions.
Q 1 What are the greatest challenges facing you as an LS/RT/ SEN teacher?
Q2 What types of support /Professional Development do you need to meet these challenges?
Q3 What is the best way for you to access this support/ professional development

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Appendix 20 Informed Consent Form



School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University College Dublin
Newman Building
Belfield
Dublin 4
Tel 01-716-8250
Fax01-716-1143

I have read the information about the focus groups and the research and have had time to consider whether to take part in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that, as part of this research project, audiotapes of my participation in the discussion will be made. I understand that my name will not be identified in any use of these records and that the transcripts will be anonymous and references to my name will be removed. I am voluntarily agreeing that the audiotapes may be studied by the research team for use in the research project and that the information gathered through this process may be used in education journals and other publications. I agree to take part in this research and hereby sign this consent form.

This consent form will be kept separate from the audio recordings and the transcripts.

Name of Participant (in block letters)	
	Male \square Female \square
Signature	
School level of interest (Primary/Post-Primary)	
County	
Session A B □ Table/Group No Da	ate

Feel free to use the back of the form to add further comments and suggestions