PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR POST-PRIMARY SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) TEACHERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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A report for the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SEN TEACHERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1.2.1 The main objectives

1.2.2 The anticipated outcomes

1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

1.4 EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

1.5 NORTHERN IRELAND CONTEXT

1.5.1 Special Education in Northern Ireland: Policy

1.5.2 Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO) 2005

1.5.3 Special Educational Needs: Code of Practice

1.5.4 Provision

1.5.5 Teacher Education and Professional Development

1.6 REPUBLIC OF IRELAND CONTEXT

1.6.1 The Post Primary Sector in the Republic of Ireland

1.6.2 Educational Legislation and EPSEN ACT (2004)

1.6.3 Special Education in the Republic of Ireland

1.6.4 Special education at post-primary level.

1.6.5 Teacher Education and Professional Development

2 LITERATURE REVIEW: MEETING SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE ORDINARY SCHOOL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.2 INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

3 RESEARCH DESIGN, METHOD, SAMPLE, DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH TOOLS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

3.3 COMPARATIVE STUDIES

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.4.1 Sample Selection

3.4.2 Data Collection

3.5 TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

3.6 RESEARCH ETHICS
4 RESEARCH FINDINGS (1) 46
4.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUANTITATIVE DATA 46
4.1.1 Schools and Teachers 46
4.1.2 Special Needs Education Policy and Provision. 47
4.1.3 Roles and Responsibilities 50
4.1.4 Professional Development Needs 51

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS (2) 56
5.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE DATA THEMES 57
5.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 58
5.2.1 Prior Professional Development 58
5.2.2 Provision of professional development 59
5.2.3 Challenges to undertaking Professional Development 61
5.2.4 Benefits of professional development 62
5.2.5 Professional Development: Future Requirements 64
5.2.6 Professional development sought for others 66
5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS: SEN TEACHERS’ ROLES 70
5.3.1 Perception of the role 70
5.3.2 Skills necessary to undertake the role 71
5.3.3 Barriers to the Role 72
5.3.4 Role Challenges. 74

6 DISCUSSION 76
6.1 COMMENTARY 77
6.1.1 Meeting Special Educational Needs in the Ordinary School: Some Cross-Cultural Conclusions 77
6.1.2 Meeting Special Educational Needs in the Ordinary School: Making Sense of the Comparative Analysis and Working Towards a more Transformative Inclusive Practice 80
6.1.3 Social, Political and Educational Contexts 81
6.1.4 Prevailing Social and Educational Values 82
6.1.5 Available Educational Technologies 84
6.1.6 Some Methodological and Reflexive Comments 87
6.2 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 89

REFERENCES 92

TABLE 1
Data Gathered 44

TABLE 2
School Types Represented in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland Samples 46
TABLE 3
Provision for SEN by LS/R/SENCO Post-Primary Teachers in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland schools represented in samples 49

TABLE 4
Mean ratings for LS/R/SENCO roles and responsibilities in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland schools represented in samples 50

TABLE 5
Mean ratings for professional development needs identified by LS/R/SENCO Post-Primary Teachers in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland schools represented in samples 52

FIGURES

FIGURE 1
Special Needs Co-ordinators: developing roles 32

FIGURE 2
Theme overview 57

FIGURE 3
A model of change in Special Needs education 80

FIGURE 4
Alternative models of teaching-learning 86

APPENDICES

Appendix 1
Sample Interview Schedule 102

Appendix 2
Sample Questionnaire 109
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This research was carried out under the auspices of SCoTENS between April 2007 and June 2008. It was carried out within the overall framework of identifying common areas for potential cross-border collaboration to promote inclusive education within second level/post primary schools in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The study set out to gain an understanding of teachers’ perceptions of their continuing professional development (CPD) needs arising from the move towards more inclusionary practices in mainstream post-primary schools.

To this end, the research investigated the CPD requirements of second level/post primary teachers who have a specific remit to work with students who have special and additional educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools in both the North and South of Ireland. These were identified as SENCOs and Learning Support/Resource (LS/R) teachers within the two jurisdictions. Specifically the project sought to make a set of recommendations for the CPD of these teachers that would be applicable in both jurisdictions.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be used to assist in the review of current CPD programmes and in the development and implementation in both jurisdictions of models of CPD that will be beneficial to schools, teachers and students. It is through well grounded, well researched, and evidence-based professional development programmes that system capacity improves in addressing educational provision for students identified with special needs.

In addition, it was anticipated that the CPD needs identified by the participants would be closely associated with the roles they were undertaking currently within their specific school contexts.

The Research Context

Meeting special educational needs in the context of mainstream schools and classrooms is one of the most complex challenges facing education today. Traditionally, across Ireland, provision for pupils with disabilities and special needs has tended to take place in segregated settings. Recently the move to more inclusive systems worldwide where all pupils are educated and welcomed in the mainstream has placed increased demands on all those involved. The preparation and ongoing CPD of teachers with responsibilities for special educational needs is of paramount importance in ensuring that students have access to the best possible education that meets their needs.

The growing impetus of inclusion necessitates that all teachers, primary and secondary, have the skills necessary to address the needs of a range of diverse learners on a daily basis successfully. This requires not only input at a pre-service level, but also CPD aimed at strengthening the knowledge, skills and competencies of teachers as they progress through their careers. Both internationally and in Ireland there is a growing body of research on
inclusive education. In Ireland, however, the dominant focus of inclusive education research has been at an operational level, exploring school and curriculum adaptations rather than addressing the development of the knowledge, skills and expertise needed to teach students with special and additional needs effectively. Thus there is a need to develop this knowledge base related to the CPD needs of teachers currently in SEN roles in second level settings. It has been established that many variables contribute to positive educational outcomes for all students. The most influential in-school factors which impact on student learning, however, are the teachers whom the students encounter on a daily basis. Students benefit most from a well educated teaching force. Those with a remit for special needs within a school have a key role to play in the successful inclusion of students with SEN.

International research has demonstrated the importance of teacher education in effecting change and moving to more inclusive systems at all levels. There is evidence that to facilitate this change special needs education needs to be embedded in initial teacher education, in induction and in CPD programmes.

This study incorporated a comparative North-South component to provide perspectives that might assist the two jurisdictions in reviewing and evaluating their individual practices from a broader perspective. The intent was to explore any similarities between contexts that might provide the key as to whether particular approaches to CPD might or might not work in another context. Similarities can provide a useful framework within which any differences between the jurisdictions can be analysed. The intent was to take a non-evaluative approach designed to educate, to inform, and to contribute to the understanding of the challenges involved in creating appropriate CPD opportunities in SEN for second level/post primary SENCOs and LS/R Teachers in both jurisdictions.

The Research Process

The research was carried out over a fifteen month period. A mixed-method design was used to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed method designs have the advantage of yielding richer, more valid and more reliable findings than evaluations based on either qualitative or quantitative methods alone. A mixed method approach is also likely to increase the acceptance of findings and conclusions by the various stakeholders.

The research was carried out in two main phases. The first phase consisted of a questionnaire designed to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data and derived from the research literature. This was piloted on a small group of current practitioners. Specific adjustments were necessary to reflect the differences in the educational systems of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Semi-structured interviews with a sample of the original participants were used in phase two.

General Findings and Recommendations

This research set out to identify common areas for potential cross-border collaboration to promote inclusive
education in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The focus adopted was the professional development requirements of ‘inclusion specialists’ - teachers specifically appointed to the area of special educational needs in mainstream schools. It was anticipated that the professional development required would be associated with the roles undertaken by the teachers and therefore both these elements were highlighted in the research process.

Across both jurisdictions it would appear that the role has evolved very much in reaction to the needs of the individual schools and in relation to the relative importance accorded to special needs support within the schools. The perceived lack of direction from the respective departments of education is common to both jurisdictions, despite the existence of official policy documents. While retaining a sense of differing school cultures and the constantly changing needs of students, which requires the role to remain flexible to best meet the needs of unique populations, it would seem that there is a need for coherence among schools within each jurisdiction so that there is a more common approach to the delivery of support services in line with each Department of Education policy.

In examining the skills and knowledge that participants feel are needed to carry out the role successfully, both pedagogy and curriculum areas are conspicuous by their relative lack of emphasis. The main skills mentioned were related to organization and time management. One might question whether these are generic skills that belong to general teacher education and general professional development programmes rather than being viewed as specific skills particularly pertinent to inclusion specialists. Other skills participants considered essential for the role were akin to a range of personal attributes. Again the question arises as to whether ‘patience’, ‘sensitivity to students’ needs’ and ‘positive regard for students’ should be the prerogative of the SEN teacher or part of a set of generic skills for all teachers.

The barriers to carrying out the role successfully were very much the same for both jurisdictions. Lack of time and an overload of paperwork appear to be the main stumbling blocks. Many respondents do not have sufficient time allocated to the role, some are trying to fulfil the role alongside having the responsibility of a full teaching timetable. There would seem to be a case for some clearer guidelines regarding the full time versus part time nature of the role. There may be some value in developing a model that assigns the role according to the number of pupils in the school. There would, however, need to be some flexibility for schools designated as ‘high needs’ or disadvantaged where the number of pupils requiring support may be high.

In the main the role in both jurisdictions appeared to be somewhat peripheral to the main activity of the school, with a particularly heavy reliance in the RoI on withdrawal. Some indications were in evidence of moving the role towards a more central, senior management role where the expertise of the inclusion specialist was made available for whole school staff development. This is a welcome development where the goal of inclusion and the means of addressing
the needs of all students was perceived as a concern of the whole school staff. The opportunity for inclusion specialists/SEN teachers to promote critical, reflective dialogue among the whole school staff should be considered as a key future development of the role and corresponding professional development offered to hone teachers’ team building and leadership skills in this field.

In relation to specific professional development sought, there was a strong emphasis on information pertaining to various classifications of disability and a corresponding lack of emphasis on pedagogy and curricular adaptations. As noted previously, the role seems to be interpreted as one which acts as a buttress to the current status quo rather than challenge it. Professional development sought by teachers is generally based on the teacher’s current role. However professional development also has a function in informing the nature of the role. If professional development precisely mirrors the role undertaken by the teacher, it results in stagnation and little forward movement towards a more inclusive education system. This symbiotic relationship between these two elements is not always fully exploited in professional development programmes to ensure exposure to topics outside those areas perceived as being immediately useful by the inclusion specialist/SEN teacher. New directions must be sought for professional development which promotes critical reflection and dynamic, creative approaches to including all students in mainstream schools.

In summary, from this research it would appear that with regard to the role of the specialist teacher working in the area of inclusion/special educational needs in mainstream schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, there is more variation within rather than between the two jurisdictions. In consequence of this commonality, potential areas can be identified for future collaboration in designing professional development programmes to promote inclusive education. Courses focusing on exploring the philosophical and sociological foundations of inclusion and developing creative ways of moving the inclusive education agenda forward should be core components of such programmes, combined with the research skills to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of approaches undertaken. Other areas contributing to such professional development programmes could include holistic curricula, inclusive pedagogy, knowledge of disabilities, instructional skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, presentation skills and administrative skills. The overarching philosophy of such a programme should be for professional development to interrogate and inform the role rather than have the current role dictate the nature of professional development.

The evidence from this research suggests that respondents perceived their role as LS/R/SENCo teacher as being primarily a ‘remedial’ one in the Republic of Ireland and a ‘SENCo’ one in Northern Ireland. This role perception seemed to shape the professional development they felt they needed. However the international literature would suggest that best practice in inclusive education requires a shift from these models towards what
Clarke, Dyson et al. (1997) have described as the ‘External Coordinator’ and the ‘Transforming Coordinator’ models, indeed eventually moving to the ideal of the ‘Disappearing Coordinator’ model. Best practice in professional development should seek to move teachers and schools towards these transformative roles.

In the context of a changing world, there is a need to promote a vision of an equitable and just society which values all its citizens and where the most vulnerable children are accorded every opportunity to participate fully and equally with their peers.

Current practitioners in SEN roles are concerned about CPD and about the skills necessary to fulfil their roles effectively. Their needs tended to be expressed within the context of their specific role as it is implemented within their individual context. In spite of the existence of detailed policy documents in both jurisdictions there was a perception of a lack of direction from the respective Departments of Education and a need for more direction.

Skills identified as key to the role centred primarily on organization and time management rather than teaching. Other areas identified related largely to personal traits such as empathy, patience and sensitivity. Lack of time and overload of paperwork were common in both jurisdictions.

Findings suggest that CPD that leads to additional qualifications results in greater confidence and feelings of self efficacy when dealing with SEN issues. Emerging from both jurisdictions was a desire for whole school development and more collaborative approaches to SEN. There is evidence to suggest that currently expressed CPD needs are reactive rather than proactive in relation to inclusion. This is unlikely to provide the stimulus needed to inform the debate about future developments in CPD.

In terms of CPD sought, common to both the North and the South was a desire for disability specific information as opposed to information on pedagogy and curricular adaptations. This may reflect the role as being one which ‘buttresses’ the status quo rather than one that challenges it.

**Summary**

This research underlines the real need for CPD for teachers whose remit is to work with students with special and additional needs in second level/post primary schools. A coordinated programme with a whole school focus would seem to be desirable. There is also a need for certified programmes at graduate diploma and masters levels. The overarching philosophy of all such programmes should be for professional development to interrogate and inform the role for the future rather than have the current role dictate the nature of professional development.
1.1 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Ireland – North and South – has experienced significant changes since the middle of the 1990s. The most dramatic of these changes, and the most internationally well known, have been the peace process with all its implications on both parts of the island – and the economic transformations which have seen Ireland go from economic boom to a deep recession, the latter especially severely felt in the Republic. Another very important, but much less well trumpeted, revolution has also taken place during this period. That is the implementation of a policy of inclusive education on both parts of the island with substantial increases in the participation of pupils with special educational needs in the mainstream systems. International research has pointed to the need for professional development for teachers in order to ensure that inclusive education is effective and successful.

Debates, discussions and interactions which have taken place under the aegis of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), together with a research grant, provided a platform from which the professional development needs of teachers in Northern Ireland and the Republic could be compared and contrasted. The rationale for the research was 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 purpose of this research project was to investigate the professional development requirements of those second level (post primary) teachers who have a specific remit to work with students who have special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream school settings in both Northern and Southern Ireland. With the inclusion of many more students with additional needs and disabilities in mainstream classes, teachers at second level face ever increasing challenges as they work to meet the needs of the students on a daily basis. Second level teachers are now working in a variety of roles within schools as they strive to meet these various needs.

This research drew on the experiences of current, second level practitioners whose remit is to work with students with special and additional needs both North and South, to establish their professional development requirements across a variety of school-based roles.

1.1.1 Background

At present across Ireland there is a focus on educating students with SEN in mainstream settings (EPSEN, 2004; SENDO, 2005). Classroom teachers, therefore, face significant challenges as they encounter students with diverse learning needs on a daily basis. Many teachers have indicated that they lack both confidence and competence in their
ability to teach students with special needs in inclusive settings (Lombardi and Hunka, 2001; Cains and Brown, 1996). Internationally, researchers have expressed concern about the extent to which all classroom teachers are prepared to teach students with SEN (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1996; Schumm and Vaughn, 1995; Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon, and Rothlein, 1994). It has long been recognised that teachers, especially those who are relatively new to the profession, are apprehensive about their ability to teach students with SEN, and have found their preparation for inclusive classrooms inadequate at best (Garner, 1996; Dwyfor Davies and Garner, 1997). The role of the SEN specialist teacher, therefore, is crucial in providing support for colleagues in facilitating the inclusion of students with additional and special needs in a mainstream classroom.

More recently in Ireland a number of research projects identified the need for change in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes to meet the needs of teachers who work with students with SEN in mainstream classrooms (Kearns and Shevlin, 2006; Killeavy, 2001; Lambe and Bones 2006a; Lambe and Bones, 2006b; Sugrue et al., 2001; Winter, 2006). As the number of students with SEN attending mainstream second level schools continues to rise, there is a need to provide an increasing number of specialist teachers to support these students. Thus there is a need to develop a knowledge base related to the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs in SEN for teachers once they have completed their teacher education programmes and have gained experience particularly in inclusive second level settings. This project was designed to address that need.

1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT
The main aims of this research are:
• To contribute to the knowledge base, north and south, in the area of teacher education for special educational needs at post-primary level;
• To provide information, north and south, for curriculum development in teacher professional development;
• To give direction, north and south, in efficiently targeting resources in special educational needs professional development.

1.2.1 The main objectives of this research are:
• To identify the professional development requirements, north and south, of post primary teachers working in the area of special educational needs in mainstream schools
• To identify the roles and functions, north and south, of post-primary teachers working in the area of special educational needs in mainstream schools
• To develop recommendations for continuous professional development programmes, north and south, in the area of special educational needs

1.2.2 The anticipated outcomes were:
• To strengthen best practice currently in operation in the training of special needs teachers, north and south.

This research project was a joint collaboration between Queen’s University...
Belfast and University College Dublin. This collaboration between teacher education departments north and south of the border would not have been initiated without the support of SCoTENS. The SCoTENS framework in its promotion of the development of cross-border linkages has facilitated this interaction which will result in improved mutual understanding between the two institutions and the two jurisdictions. The specific focus for the research project was on the professional development of teachers working with students with special educational needs in mainstream second level schools and thus it fulfils a key objective of SCoTENS in the area of teacher education. It was anticipated that the project would result in joint conference presentations by the researchers at international conferences and thus further promote a whole island of Ireland vision in its consideration of issues in teacher education.

Internationally and in Ireland there is a growing body of literature and research in the area of inclusive education. In Ireland the dominant focus of inclusive education research 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. As indicated above, a number of projects have examined issues related to SEN in Initial Teacher Education programmes. This projects extends that to look at the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs of teachers working with students with SEN in secondary contexts. As such, it will complement the ongoing research in the field.

1.3 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 involved the cleaning and coding of the questionnaires, entering data and the analysis of the data. The final phase, Phase Four, was devoted to writing the research report, extracting the key findings and formulating evidence based recommendations.

1.4 EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT: Introduction

In many countries inclusion is now established as a key policy objective for the education of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities (Lindsay, 2007). Inclusive education and how it is practiced in schools on a daily basis has become a focus of debate and discussion in educational jurisdictions around the world (Farrell and Ainscow, 2002). The
move to a more inclusive education system has been endorsed internationally by UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). It reflects the United Nations’ global strategy of Education for All (Farrell and Ainscow, 2002). This international initiative is likely to have been the major catalyst or ‘moving force’ that has led to the evolving changes in government policy and legislation that continue to be introduced to schools and practitioners.

The underpinning principle of inclusive education is that all children have the right to be educated together regardless of any special need or disability. If schools are to be regarded as successful inclusive environments, it is likely that a professional community of support among teachers will be needed. Teamwork would appear to be essential if schools are to become effective, inclusive places in which all students can learn. The real key to successful inclusion, however, rests not in legislation but with teachers who are the people entrusted with its success or failure every day in schools. These are the teachers who are prepared to take ‘ownership’ of inclusion and who actually believe in their own competence to educate students with SEN (Thomas et al., 1998).

1.5 NORTHERN IRELAND CONTEXT

Education in Northern Ireland differs slightly from the education systems in other areas of the UK. Generally speaking, it resembles more closely the system used in England and Wales than that of Scotland. The Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) has responsibility for the areas of pre-school, primary, post-primary and special education. Northern Ireland operates a religiously segregated education system, with 95% of pupils attending either a maintained school run by the Catholic Council for Maintained School (CCMS) or a controlled school that serves mostly non-catholic students, both state funded. In addition, in recent years there has been an increase in what are known as integrated schools that attempt to bring together children, parents and teachers from both of the main religious groups. The most recent figures show that in 2008/2009 there were 147,986 post-primary pupils in 238 schools with an overall pupil teacher ratio for all secondary schools of 14.5:1 (http://www.deni.gov.uk).

Currently, education at a local level is administered by five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) covering different geographical areas. Each ELB is allocated resources by the Department of Education. These boards are as follows:

- Belfast Education and Library Board
- North Eastern Education and Library Board
- South Eastern Education and Library Board
- Southern Education and Library Board
- Western Education and Library Board

From January 2010, however, a new body will be in charge of delivering education support services to teachers and young people in Northern Ireland. The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will bring together the wide range of administrative bodies currently providing education support services. The ESA will be the single organisation that has a
clear responsibility for achieving better educational outcomes for young people in Northern Ireland.

Important for this project is the provision of education at post primary level. The Costello Report (2004) indicated that post-primary arrangements should be based on the principles of equality, quality, relevance, access, choice, respect and partnership. The aim is to meet the specific educational needs of all pupils in Northern Ireland. The report’s proposed Entitlement Framework sought to guarantee access to learning pathways offering a broad and flexible curriculum. Pupils should be able to choose a blend of courses including traditional and vocational courses that are aimed at meeting their needs, aptitudes, interests and aspirations. The report also recommended the abolition of the Transfer Test and the school year 2008-2009 sees the last group of primary students to sit the test. One of the implications of this move is that all post primary schools are likely to have increased numbers of students with SEN in their mainstream classes.

1.5.1 Special Education in Northern Ireland: Policy

Traditionally, educational policy and legislation in Northern Ireland have reflected the developments in England and Wales, and are evidenced through parallel legislative initiatives and policies. Within the UK generally, the movement towards inclusion has a long history. In the late 1990s The Green Paper, Excellence for All Children, (DfEE, 1997) and its subsequent Programme of Action - Meeting Special Educational Needs (DfEE, 1998), set out a strategy for promoting inclusion and for improving standards for children with SEN across the UK. This policy shift towards inclusion was followed and accelerated by the introduction of the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) in England and Wales and the statutory guidance document, Inclusive Schooling (DfES, 2001a), which was issued to all schools. This document supports the inclusion of pupils with SEN and states that schools “should actively seek to remove the barriers to learning and participation that can hinder or exclude pupils with special educational needs” (p.2).

The rights of children with special needs or disabilities in England and Wales were strengthened further by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001). This act was significant in that it applied anti-discrimination legislation to schools for the first time. The act makes it unlawful for schools to discriminate against pupils with special needs or disabilities in terms of their admission policies or their educational provision. All local authorities and education and library boards have a proactive duty to plan to increase accessibility and inclusion for all.

In addition, the strategy for special educational needs produced in 1994 and entitled Removing Barriers to Achievement, set out a vision for the effective education and inclusion of children with special needs and disabilities (DfES, 2004). In order to remove the barriers, there is a focus on four key areas of note:

- Early intervention to ensure that children who have difficulties
learning receive the help they need as soon as possible and that parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities have access to suitable childcare (Ch.1);

- Removing barriers to learning by embedding inclusive practice in every school and early years setting (Ch.2);

- Raising expectations and achievement by developing teachers’ skills and strategies for meeting the needs of children with SEN and sharpening the focus on their progress (Ch.3);

- An improved partnership approach – services working together to meet the needs of children and families (Ch. 4).

Significant for this research is the development of teachers’ skills and strategies for meeting the needs of the pupils with additional and special needs.

Removing barriers to learning focuses mainly on improving the quality of education for children with SEN in mainstream schools through:

- Helping schools to develop effective inclusive practices through a new ‘Inclusion Development Programme’ bringing together education, health, social care and the voluntary sector;

- Providing practical assistance for schools and local authorities to improve access for pupils with disabilities;

- Taking steps to improve the quality of education for children with more severe behavioural, social and emotional difficulties;

- Raising expectations and achievement;

- Ensuring that schools meet the learning needs of individual students;

- Working to raise the achievement of pupils with SEN;

- Working with the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and higher education institutions to ensure that training programmes provide a good grounding in core skills and knowledge of SEN;

- Delivering improvements in partnerships.

The Audit Commission’s Report on Statutory Assessment and Statements of Special Educational Needs (2002) identified a number of issues relating to inclusion and the support of students with SEN in mainstream schools. Of note was the widespread dissatisfaction with current approaches to assessment; the process of developing a Statement; the allocation of resources to support children with special educational needs; and the procedures used by schools and local authorities to ensure that SEN provision is effective.

Also included as areas of concern were:

- The delays in having children’s needs met in schools;

- Children who should be taught in mainstream being turned away and forced to seek alternate placements;

- Many staff feeling ill equipped to meet the wide range of pupil needs;

- The uncertainty felt by special schools about their future, and the varying levels of support offered to families by schools, local education authorities or local health services (DfES, 2004).
In Northern Ireland, the framework for inclusion was established primarily through the Education (Northern Ireland) Order (DENI, 1996) and the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP, DENI, 1998). This code was similar to that issued in England and Wales (COP DfES, 1994). It should be noted, however, that a major review of special education has been completed recently in Northern Ireland and the results and recommendations from this review are expected shortly. It may be that some of the outcomes of this review and the subsequent recommendations will result in significant changes in the whole area of SEN in the North. It should also be noted that, in addition to the legislation outlined above, the enactment of the Equality (Disability, etc) (Northern Ireland) Order (2000) ensured that the rights of disabled people were the same as those in the rest of the UK.

1.5.2 Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SENDO) 2005
More recently a significant development in terms of legislation and guidance has been the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order (SENDO). Effective as of September 2005, it has been a major catalyst for change within the system. SENDO enacts similar provisions to those that were implemented in the rest of the UK under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001). This act amended the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995) to make unjustified discrimination by education providers against disabled pupils, students and adult learners unlawful. SENDA also required education bodies such as schools, colleges, and universities to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled people in education do not suffer a substantial disadvantage in comparison to people who are not disabled. For most types of education provider, making ‘reasonable adjustments’ includes:
- Making changes to practices or procedures
- Making changes to physical features
- Providing extra support (such as specialist teachers or equipment).

In terms of schools, the duty under SENDA to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ does not extend to providing extra support or changing physical features. This is because extra support is already available for school pupils with statements of Special Educational Need (SEN), and schools are expected to make longer term plans for improving access to their buildings.

The SENDO legislation in Northern Ireland is intended to strengthen the rights of children with special educational needs to be educated in mainstream schools and to remove the exemption of the education sector from the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). The day to day impact of this is to make it unlawful for schools to discriminate against students with special educational needs.

The revised framework for the Northern Ireland Curriculum (CCEA, 2004a; 2004b) came into effect in post-primary schools from September 2007. Substantial changes are involved at the post-primary level and the anticipated dissolution of the selective system of education is seen as a further step towards achieving equity
of choice for all pupils not just those with SEN (Hunter and O’Connor, 2006). The revised curriculum arrangements include the stipulation that pupils with special and additional needs should have access to the same range of learning pathways available to other students (DENI, 2004). These changes are likely to have a significant impact on pupils, parents, teachers and schools and on the practice of inclusion, especially as more students with diverse needs proceed into post primary education.

1.5.3 Special Educational Needs: Code of Practice
Under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, the statutory responsibility for provision for pupils with special educational needs is firmly with the current Education and Library Boards and Boards of Governors of mainstream schools (http://www.deni.gov.uk).

The department provided guidance in SEN matters for ELBs and schools in the form of a Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP, DENI 1998). The Department of Education then issued a Supplement to the Code of Practice (DENI 2005) as a result of the Special Educational Needs Disability Order (SENDO, 2005). Schools and ELBs, along with Health and Social Service authorities must have ‘due regard’ to the Code when deciding on provision for children with SEN (http://www.deni.gov.uk/the_code_of_practice.pdf).

In terms of SEN, the key objective in the education of children with special and additional needs is inclusion. This is where children with special and additional needs are educated in mainstream classes alongside pupils of the same age who do not have any additional needs. The fundamental principles for the education of children with SEN are that:

- Children with SEN should have their needs met;
- These needs will normally be met in mainstream schools or settings;
- The views of the child should be sought and taken into account;
- Parents have a vital role to play in supporting their child’s education;
- Children with SEN should be offered full access to a broad, balanced and relevant education, including any relevant early years curriculum. (see www.eurydice.org)

According to DENI, the provision of special educational needs is matched to the pupil’s individual needs. This provision may be made in a number of places including in a special school, in a special unit that is attached to a mainstream school or within a mainstream class in a regular school alongside peers. The COP (sec. 1.6) indicates “the needs of most pupils will be met in mainstream schools and without a statutory assessment or a statement. Children with special educational needs, including those with statements, should, wherever appropriate and taking into account the wishes of their parents be educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools”.

Under the Code of Practice, each school is required to have a SEN coordinator (SENCO) with responsibility for working with teachers, for the day-to-day operation of the school’s SEN policy, and
for coordinating SEN provision in the school. Although not stated explicitly in the Code, it is implied that the SENCO is a qualified teacher. The National Standards for SENCOs (TTA 1998), introduced by the Teacher Training Agency, set out the knowledge, skills, understanding and training that SENCOs should have to carry out their role effectively. The standards indicated that SENCOs should be skilled teachers in their own subject or phase, and should have leadership, decision-making, communication and self-management skills. The standards also said that head teachers should ensure that SENCOs have the necessary training to develop and maintain those skills. The National Standards for SENCOs defined the core purpose of the SENCO and the areas in which s/he should work.

As seen in England and Wales, there was much confusion around the role of the SENCO and the qualifications needed for the job. In England the Education Act 2006 (s173) set out new regulations to tackle concerns over the inconsistencies in the role, and the status and training of SENCOs. The new regulations aim to improve outcomes for pupils with SEN by ensuring effective SENCO procedures at school level. The regulations prescribe the qualifications and experience necessary for SENCOs as well as plans for national accredited training for new SENCOs. The legislation in England and Wales (due to come into force in September 2009) prescribes the qualifications and experience required for SENCOs, the functions of governing bodies, as well as setting out plans for national accredited training for new SENCOs. It is unclear at the present moment if Northern Ireland will follow with similar legislation although previous experience might suggest this could be the case.

1.5.4 Provision
As indicated above, most pupils with SEN are educated in mainstream classes. There are some, however, who attend special schools. In Northern Ireland currently, there are 44 special schools (including two hospital schools) and 170 special units attached to 88 mainstream schools which cater for a wide range of special educational needs. In addition, all five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) provide specialist “outreach” support services for children who are experiencing difficulty in literacy and those who present with behavioural challenges (http://www.deni.gov.uk).

The information provided by DENI for parents indicates that in Northern Ireland a child is deemed to have special educational needs if he or she has learning difficulties and needs special help. This help is known as special educational provision and can be made with or without a statutory assessment or statement. The assessment is a very detailed examination which will find out exactly what the child’s special educational needs are and all the special help which may be required. When the ELB has collected all of the necessary information about the child’s special needs, it decides whether or not to make a Statement of Special Educational Needs (DENI;COP, 1998). This statement is made by the ELB when it decides that the help the child needs cannot reasonably be provided within the resources normally available to the mainstream school. These resources include money, staff time and
special equipment. The statement also includes information about the school to which the child will go to get the special help. Admission to special schools is made according to needs; however the criteria for admission appear to vary across boards. Special schools usually take children with particular types of special needs although some ordinary schools may have special provision for particular disabilities in that they may have good access for pupils with physical disabilities or special teaching for pupils with hearing or sight difficulties. Current figures from the Department of Education suggest that approximately 15% of school-aged children in Northern Ireland have some special educational need. That would equate to somewhere in the region of 45-50,000 pupils.

The seven main areas of special educational need or difficulty are:
- Cognitive and Learning;
- Social, Emotional and Behavioural;
- Communication and Interaction;
- Sensory;
- Physical;
- Medical Conditions/Syndromes;
- Other.

Information on subgroups within each of the above categories can be accessed at [http://www.deni.gov.uk/sen_categories.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/sen_categories.pdf)

Furthermore, DENI notes:
- Most children with special educational needs will go to an ordinary school and their needs will be met without the need for a statutory assessment or a statement;
- Children with statements often go to an ordinary school; in some cases they attend a special unit attached to an ordinary school;
- Some children with special educational needs will go to special schools;
- All children in special schools will usually have statements, or be undergoing statutory assessment. (http://www.deni.gov.uk).

1.5.5 Teacher Education & Professional Development

As suggested above, teachers are key players within an education system that strives to be inclusive by developing its capacity to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers must be both competent and confident in their ability to teach all students regardless of any particular need. Brownell and Pajares (1999, p.154) emphasise that teachers’ beliefs are “important determinants and predictors of teaching practices”. In a review of the literature on inclusion, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) note a number of studies that suggest;“the school’s ethos and the teachers’ beliefs have a considerable impact on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion which, in turn, are translated into practice” (p.140). Initial teacher education (ITE), ongoing in-service and professional development is essential, therefore, to develop the skills necessary to teach successfully in inclusive settings. With reference to initial teacher education, Mittler (2000) states:

> Ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive teaching is the best investment that can be made. (p.137)

This is echoed by Cook (2002) who states:
If pre-service teachers do not possess the knowledge and skills to implement inclusion appropriately, the included students with disabilities in their future classes will certainly have diminished opportunities to attain desired outcomes regardless of teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive reforms. (p. 263)

According to the Department of Education (DENI), there are four key stages of a teacher’s professional development: initial; induction (the first year of teaching); early professional development (EPD, the second and third years of teaching); and continuing professional development (CPD, year four and onwards). These are presented in significant detail in the Teacher Education Partnership Handbook (1998) available at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/teacher_education_partnership_handbook-3.pdf

The partnerships are between the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the Education and Library Boards (ELBs), and the schools. These groups are seen as crucial players in teacher development. The handbook is based on some common principles:

1. First, there should be a common approach to initial teacher education across the HEIs;
2. Second, as far as practicable, there should be a common profile of competences used by all HEIs, all ELBs, other employing bodies and all schools which will underpin the students’ and beginning teachers’ professional development;
3. Third, the development of links between initial, induction and the early years of in-service education should enhance the career-long professionalism of teachers and reinforce co-operation between employers, HEIs, schools and the Boards’ Support Services. (p.5)

The stages of induction and early professional development are seen as central to continuing professional development for teachers. The reflective practice being promoted is similar to that which underpins staff development and performance review (SDPR). The handbook states;

The aim of an integrated approach to teacher education is to encourage beginning professionals to develop their critical, reflective practice in order to improve their teaching and the quality of pupils’ learning. As the beginning teacher grows in competence, the focus of development shifts progressively from learning how to teach, to thinking about teaching, and finally, to thinking about learning. Such reflective practice is characterised by an open, informed, critical dialogue amongst all the partners, combined with support from experienced practitioners. (p.5)

All three stages of professional development are underpinned by a competency approach intended to “encourage teachers to focus appropriately on aspects of their practice” (p.6). Under the core criteria, the handbook describes teachers who undertake professional development as people who:

• Engage in self appraisal and critical evaluation of their work;
• Engage in professional development both as individuals and through working constructively and in a spirit of collegiality with others in a professional context;
• Keep up to date with relevant aspects of their subject(s);
• Are open to the possibilities of change and innovation.

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) produced a document entitled Teaching: The reflective profession in 2007. Included was an overview of the professional competences expected of teachers. The report states:

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) has consistently rejected any attempt to adopt a reductionist approach to professional development, and the adoption of a competence based analysis underpins the Council’s belief that professional knowledge is by its very nature organic, and to an extent evolutionary, reflecting a synthesis of research, experiences gained and expertise shared in communities of practice. (p.4)


Included in the competences are the following (numbers as per the report):

9. A knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and know the features of the most common special needs and appropriate strategies to address these. (p.14)

15. Plan and evaluate lessons that enable all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to meet learning objectives/ outcomes/ intentions, showing high expectations and an awareness of potential areas of difficulty. (p.14)

21. Employ strategies that motivate and meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special and additional educational needs and for those not learning in their first language. (p.14)

The policy of including students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms is now established in many jurisdictions. Successful implementation of such policy is dependent largely on educators having requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies. This poses a considerable challenge to both novice and experienced teachers. Initial teacher training and ongoing professional development are critical to the success of inclusion programmes. This research study examining the professional development needs of secondary support teachers in both the North and the South of Ireland provides information critical to the design, development, and implementation of evidence based and effective SEN professional development instruction for teachers in the two jurisdictions.

1.6 REPUBLIC OF IRELAND CONTEXT

Provision and practice of Special Education and teacher professional development.

In the Republic of Ireland Article 42 of the constitution states that parents have the primary rights and responsibilities for the education of their children. The state is constitutionally obliged to provide for free primary education and requires that children receive a minimum education, moral, intellectual and social (Ireland 1937). With the enactment, some sixty years later, of the Education Act, a legislative basis was established for
the education system in Ireland. This act instituted on a statutory basis the rights of all citizens to receive an education including those with disabilities or special educational needs (Ireland 1998).

The Department of Education and Science is the central body responsible for the administration of public education, primary, second level and special education. It is also a conduit for subsidies to universities and third level institutions and supports pre-school education and adult education. Compulsory education is from six to sixteen. However in practice children begin school on average at age four, remaining in primary school for eight years until age twelve, and transfer to post-primary school for five to six years of education, with 80% remaining in school until age eighteen. The only public exams are at second level - the Junior Certificate (taken at age 15-16) and Leaving Certificate (taken at age 17-18), both of which are externally administered and assessed by a single body, the State Exam Commission.

Although all primary schools and the majority of secondary schools are locally owned and managed, the curriculum, and associated pedagogy for primary education and for post-primary education is determined at national level and the Department inspectorate is responsible for its implementation. In contrast, pre-school education and adult education and training are much less formally organised (DES 2006).

1.6.1 The Post Primary sector in the Republic of Ireland

There are three main types of school at post-primary level: voluntary secondary schools (usually owned and run by religious organisations and mainly single sex); vocational schools/colleges (owned and run by Vocational Education Committees - VECs, and mainly co-educational) and comprehensive and community schools (established by the State, owned by boards of trustees, run by boards of management and mainly co-educational). These categories of recognised post-primary schools must conform to the DES’s requirements in regard to educational standards and the curriculum.

At the time of writing, the most recent year for which figures were available was 2006/2007. In this academic year there were 303,527 students in total enrolled in the combined junior and senior cycles in the three types of post-primary schools. (This excludes post-leaving certificate / further education students in second-level schools.) In all there were 732 schools, with a pupil-teacher ratio of 13.1:1 (http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobservlet/statistics_key_06_07.pdf). The vocational schools (247 of schools or 34%) are the only ones which are fully in the state sector. The majority of the remaining schools are either owned or managed, in full or in part, by religious authorities. In the post-primary sector, government expenditure on education, at €8,131 per student, doubled in the 10 year period between 1996 and 2006 (DES 2006).

1.6.2 Educational Legislation and EPSEN ACT (2004)

The Republic of Ireland has ratified international legislation that upholds human rights and the rights of people with disability to be treated equally in every sphere of life. These rights
are further strengthened by national legislation - the Education Act (Ireland, 1998), the Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2004, the Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004, Education Welfare Act (Ireland, 2004), the Equality Act (Ireland, 2004), the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (Ireland, 2004) and the Disability Act (Ireland, 2005). Thus, all people, with and without disabilities, have equal rights in law. These rights extend to the education system, although they are curtailed throughout the legislation by phrases implying ‘as resources permit’. The Education Act (1998) provides a legislative basis to the education system in Ireland. It notes the right of all citizens to receive an education, and makes specific reference to the rights of those with disabilities or special educational needs.

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. The definition of disability, as outlined in legislation, has moved from a personal deficit model to one that highlights the effects of disability. In the EPSEN Act this reads as

’a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition, which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition’. S.1 p6; S 36 p36 EPSEN Act 2004

This definition acknowledges differences in learning and incorporates an allusion to the educational context in which learning occurs. The main provisions of the EPSEN Act are that children with special educational needs are to be educated alongside other children who do not have special educational needs, unless it is inconsistent with the best interest of the child or the effective provision of education for the other children. Assessments are mandatory and deemed to include an evaluation and statement of the nature and extent of disability and an evaluation and statement of the necessary services. Education plans are to be developed and to include the nature and degree of the child’s abilities, skills, talent; the nature of disability; how the disability affects educational progress; the child’s present level of performance; their special educational needs and special supports (appropriate to various categories of disabilities) needed, and the goals over a 12 month period or less. In total the EPSEN Act covers a number of areas. The principal provisions are:

- Inclusive Education (Section 2)
- Assessment (Section 3, 4, 5, 6)
- Individual Education Plans (Section 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12)
- Duty of Schools (Section 14)
- Designation of Schools (S 10)
- Provision of Services (Section 7)
- Implementation of Education Policy by Health Boards (Section 16, 17, 39)
- Establishment of NCSE (Section 19 to 50)
- NCSE to prepare Implementation Report (Section 23)
- Establishment of Special Education Appeals Board (Section 36, 37)
- Provision of independent mediation by ministerial regulations (Section 38)
- Maintenance of records (Section 41)
While some aspects of the Act give rise to debate – eg the medical deficit model underpinning aspects of the legislation the potential benefits of establishing a legislative basis for the education of children identified as having special educational needs were welcomed. Unfortunately, a major fallout of the current economic downturn has been the decision to suspend the EPSEN Act.

1.6.3 Special Education in the Republic of Ireland: Provision

Although the Republic of Ireland has a long history of providing for students with special needs, it has been in segregated settings. Since the founding of a school for the hearing impaired in the 1800s, it became the practice for young people with disabilities to be categorised according to disability and placed in separate, special schools. At present Ireland is undergoing significant change. The change is 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 can be traced through a number of reports and policy developments - the Special Education Review Committee report (Ireland, 1993), Charting our Education Future: White Paper on Education, (Ireland, 1995), and A Strategy for Equality: Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Ireland, 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, as previously mentioned, limits are placed on the extent of inclusive provision by reference to a consideration of the detrimental effect on others and by reference to the availability of resources. This absolves the state from the full obligation to inclusive provision (DES 2006, Griffin and Shevlin 2007).

For many years, Department of Education and Science policy on the education of students with special educational needs at post-primary level was meagre, with few direct circulars pertaining to this area being issued and a heavy reliance on policy being inferred from circulars issued at primary level. This lacuna was finally addressed with the publication of the document entitled Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines which the DES published in 2007. The five chapters of the guidelines cover the following areas:

• Historical background; Current Provision; Legislative Context
• Whole school Planning & Organisation
• Partnership in Special Education: Roles & Functions
• Planning for Individual Students with Special Educational Needs
• Teaching and Learning in Inclusive Schools

This publication has been invaluable in identifying the department perspective on the role and remit of the special education teacher in the post-primary sector.

The areas addressed in the post-primary guidelines focus mainly on organizational and partnership issues. Prior to this publication, a series of booklets from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) provided suggestions on adapting curricula for students with
special educational needs at second level. The first three booklets issued in the Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Difficulties series covered ‘Language, literature and communication’, ‘Mathematical studies and applications’ and ‘Social, political and environmental education’. These were later followed by a number of other subject-area based guidelines available online or on CD ROM.

In publishing these two sets of guidelines on the organization of and curricular adaptations for students identified as having special educational needs, there have been efforts made to address the barriers to learning faced by students with special educational needs at post-primary level. However, assuming that teachers are familiar with these documents is a completely separate and contestable issue.

1.6.4 Special Education at Post-Primary level

Until the 1990s, the great majority of students of post-primary age with disabilities attended special schools, though these were classified as national (ie primary) schools. In the wake of the 1993 Special Education Review Committee report and the consequence of successful litigation by parents of children with disabilities, the number of children with special needs attending mainstream primary and post-primary schools increased, and special provision was made for them. Theoretically, three main options exist for students with special educational needs: enrolment in a mainstream class with additional support from a resource teacher or special needs assistant; placement in a special class in a mainstream school, and a third option of placement in a special school catering for the student’s particular disability. However, particularly at post-primary level, these options are not all available in a student’s local community.

In addition to placement options, the Department of Education and Science provides other supports and services to children with special educational needs. These range from additional teaching hours, reduced pupil-teacher ratios, special needs assistants (whose function is primarily one of care but is interpreted on a local basis), enhanced capitation (recently withdrawn as part of budget cuts), assistive technology and school transport where required. The continued expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) is another key resource funded by the department which offers a psychological assessment and advisory service to schools (DES 2006).

1.6.5 Teacher Education and Professional Development

In the Republic of Ireland, teacher education is generally perceived as comprising three phases. The first phase is initial teacher education which occurs prior to entry to the teaching profession; the second, the induction phase, is when teachers begin their teaching career, and the third phase is subsequent in-career professional development. This has been part of government policy since the publication of the White Paper on Education: Charting Our Education Future in 1995. Virtually all of the initial teacher education courses in Ireland contain modules on special educational needs. (Kearns and Shevlin 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 beginning teachers. Recent research demonstrates that SEN has been identified as one of the priority concerns for induction programmes and beginning teachers who are engage in the programme are offered input in this area (Killeavy and Murphy, 2006).

The third phase of teacher education, the in-career stage, has expanded exponentially from a paucity of provision to a plurality of professional development opportunities. This transformation was instigated in response to the 1991 OECD review of Irish education policies, which identified induction and in-career professional learning as key target areas for investment. Hence, the in-career phase is characterized by a plurality of widely available opportunities to undertake continuing professional development (CPD), especially in the teaching of students with additional educational needs. Currently, CPD in the area of special education is offered by a number of course providers ranging from government funded third level postgraduate degrees to commercial on-line certificates. The courses offered by third level institutions are formally accredited while other courses are subjected to varying degrees of scrutiny and evaluation.

Although the Teaching Council in the Republic of Ireland is more recently established than that in Northern Ireland and has just completed its first term it has, nevertheless, accorded a high priority to setting down Codes of Professional Conduct and regulations for initial teacher education. The Codes assert that ‘teachers in their professional role show commitment to democracy, social justice, equality and inclusion’ (Teaching Council 2007:19). In terms of their relationships with pupils and other stakeholders, the Codes specify that:

*Teachers should respect students, parents, colleagues, school management, co-professionals and all in the school community. They should interact with them in a way that does not discriminate and that promotes equality in relation to gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, ethnicity, membership of the Travelling Community and socio-economic status (ibid. p.25).*

With regard to initial teacher education, the Council has incorporated in the draft regulations submitted to the Minister for approval that studies in the foundational disciplines of education should include inputs on inclusion and diversity for children with special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and intercultural education.

As regards the Department of Education and Science, at present the recognized professional qualification for teachers working in the area of SEN is a one year fulltime postgraduate diploma provided by universities and colleges of education. These professional diploma qualifications, which encompass a supervised and assessed practicum, offer a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and values development and require formal examination and validation. 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 assists teachers and schools through individual teacher/school in-service and regional in-service. Further assistance in the area of whole school planning for SEN is available through the DES primary and post-primary school development planning initiatives. Additional professional learning opportunities are available through curriculum and classroom practice oriented support programmes provided by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) and Primary Support Programme (PSP), both of which are funded by the DES. Voluntary teacher support groups and, more recently, teacher unions also provide some courses for teachers in the area of special needs.

Another source of teacher information on SEN teachers are the commercially produced SEN on-line courses which 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, the provision of professional development in the area of SEN is characterized by a diversity of providers and a range of certified and non-certified options.

The increasing breadth of courses available in inclusive and special education is recognition of the need for a system-wide response to the growing diversity in mainstream education. Responsibility for including children with diverse needs is no longer perceived as the province of a single teacher but rather as a school community responsibility. At post-primary level, the dominance of exam focused education has given rise to uncompromising school structures and to subject-based curricula incompatible with the needs of a diverse school population. This system inadequacy is compounded by a teaching force predominantly trained at a time when pedagogy for diversity did not feature in initial teacher education and there were few opportunities for professional learning in a career spanning forty years.

Significant progress has been made at second level in the provision, albeit limited, of adapted programmes such as the Junior Certificate School Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes. Teacher professional learning opportunities have increased for both the specialist teacher of SEN and for the subject teacher.

There has been a discernible shift in the perception of the Learning Support/Resource teacher from being the sole provider of learning support to pupils with SEN to a perception of the LS/R teacher as a consultant for the whole school community advising on adapting structures, curricula and pedagogy for the inclusion of a diverse range of students. (DES, 2007). This entails a repositioning of the LS/R teacher from a marginalised, isolated role to a position within the
school management structure. This repositioning necessitates a concurrent rethinking of the professional learning necessary for LS/R teachers - from CPD that focuses on student deficit and support to CPD that develops the skills and knowledge appropriate for teachers to take on a consultancy and management role.

As we have noted, internationally and in Ireland, research in the area of inclusive education has given rise to an expanding body of literature. Much of the research has focused on school and curriculum adaptations. In Ireland the area of continuing professional development for teachers to acquire the knowledge, skills and expertise to teach students with special educational needs effectively has been under-researched. The research evidence which is available from Ireland indicates that the success or otherwise of creating inclusive schools will lie on 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 and Shevlin, 2007: 253).
Teachers are needed who are prepared to learn and relearn the self, and construct and reshape their own professional identity, and in so doing refine their own personal and professional values. Dealing with diversity is a major undertaking, and learning to teach inclusively involves coming to understand oneself and one’s values in relation to others, and appreciating the ways in which classrooms can be transformed, so that learning is enhanced for all students. It is certainly a difficult and demanding, if not an inspiring and invigorating process, but one which all teacher educators and prospective teachers should be prepared to embrace. (Moran, 2007b: 15)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to provide a context for the research, this study reviewed evidence from a number of countries. The international trends towards greater inclusion of students with special educational needs within mainstream schooling have led to changes in school organization and to the development of new roles within mainstream schools. In particular, schools at secondary level have identified roles variously described in the literature as ‘resource teacher’, ‘learning support teacher’, ‘support teacher’ or ‘special educational needs coordinator’. While countries differ somewhat in terms of the responsibilities and duties assigned to these various roles, what emerges very strongly from the research to date is the incremental nature of the workload and complexity attaching to these roles.

Of particular interest here is the Innovatory Mainstream Practice project based at the University of Newcastle in England during the mid 1980s to early 1990s (Clarke, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore 1997). There are a number of key messages from this project.

Meeting special educational needs in the context of the ordinary school and classroom has been described as one of the most complex challenges facing education both past and present - one essentially caught between two seemingly irreconcilable discourses (see, for example, Norwich, 2008). That is, between a discourse favouring dividing needs into special and ordinary and seeking to meet special needs through special provision and teaching; and an alternative concerned with advancing the values of equity and participation by developing the quality of teaching-learning for all within a common setting and framework ( Barton, 1998; Dyson, 1993; Norwich, 2008). The inclusion agenda is simply the latest in a range of attempts at trying to resolve the seemingly intractable diversity dilemma of commonality and difference within a common framework (Dyson, 1993).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Alan Dyson and his colleagues, then at the University of Newcastle, set out to investigate how mainstream schools were coping with and meeting the diversity challenge, particularly in light of the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act or ERA - legislation having far reaching consequences for education generally and special needs education in particular. Mirrored in Northern Ireland through the introduction of the Northern
Ireland Order 1989, this legislation introduced a detailed National (common) curriculum for all, as well as governance provisions designed to align public sector organisations with the methods, cultures and ethical systems of private sector organisations (Clarke, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore 1997). Since we believe that a number of the key ideas and themes from this project have relevance to the interpretation of some of our own results, a summary of this research is presented here. For example, the authors:

- Believed that the history of special needs education was best be characterised as a series of proposed resolutions to the fundamental dilemma of commonality and difference;
- Suggested that educational change in general, and change in educational special needs provision in particular, was, to put it mildly, an extremely complex, fluid and messy business;
- Argued that proposals for change did not simply materialize out of the ether, but were grounded in particular social, economic and political contexts. Consequently, any proposal towards a resolution of the fundamental diversity dilemma that either underestimated or downplayed the importance of the following interacting forces and processes was most certainly doomed to failure:
  - the prevailing meaning structures and values that were prevalent in society as a whole and in the various sub-groups within society that had the power to involve themselves in education (during the period of their research, the human values of equity and participation were dominant in special needs education although this situation was seriously challenged by the introduction of education in the market-place following ERA);
  - the particular social economic and political context;
  - the range of pedagogies, curricula, and school systems at hand or that could be generated (educational technologies);
- Discovered that, at the level of schools as organisations, particular approaches to the resolution of the special needs dilemma rarely took place uniformly; more typically, newer resolutions were overlaid over older resulting in some very complex and unique patterns of practice at different organisational sites;
- Argued that, during the latter part of the 20th Century, the whole school approach to the resolution of the special needs dilemma achieved - at the level of rhetoric at least had become something of an orthodoxy. The whole-school approach was designed to move special and mainstream education a significant step closer together. Rather than working outside the mainstream curriculum and locating the responsibility for special needs with so-called remedial teachers and their special techniques, the assumption behind this resolution was that the remedial teacher (now called the special needs co-ordinator) would work
in partnership with mainstream colleagues in order to help the latter incorporate some of the techniques of remedial education within mainstream practice;

Discovered that the whole school approach was a bit of a chimera. As Dessent (1987, p 119) somewhat ruefully pointed out, after a decade or more of advocacy: “The whole school approach represented the new holy grail within the field of special education - much talked about, advocated by all, but difficult to find in practice”. Although certain forms of organisation such as in-class support, the designation of special needs co-ordinators and the concept of curricular adaptation or differentiation were advocated, these tended to be overlain on top of, rather than displace, more traditional forms of provision. Furthermore, the merger of mainstream and special education tended to be a somewhat one-sided affair with the latter reconstructing itself in order to take place in ordinary schools and classrooms, whilst the former remained substantially unchanged. Special education merely contorted itself into a succession of new forms, without ever really persuading mainstream education to do the same (Clarke, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore 1997, p165).

The authors also discovered some schools where the particular circumstances facilitated very much more creative solutions to the commonality - difference paradox. Specifically, they came across a very small number of school leaders and special needs co-ordinators who, in creative and tenacious pursuit of their commitment to values of equity and participation, went beyond the whole-school approach. These solutions involve a double move: that is, away from an exclusive concern with a clearly delineated group of students identified as having special needs towards a concern to support and improve the learning of all students; and away from direct intervention with students towards an involvement in staff and organisational development (see, Dyson, 1993). There seemed to be three approaches in particular, involving the following three co-ordinator roles, that helped to achieve these creative resolutions i.e. the extended co-ordinator, the transformed co-ordinator and the disappearing co-ordinator (see Table1, derived from Dyson, 1993 and Clark, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore, 1997).
### Table 1: Special Needs Co-ordinators: Developing Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Remedial Teacher</th>
<th>The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator</th>
<th>The Extended Co-ordinator</th>
<th>The Transforming Co-ordinator</th>
<th>The Disappearing Co-ordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical of special need provision within English secondary schools during the 70s</td>
<td>Towards the end of the 80s the whole-school approach, at least at the level of rhetoric, had achieved something of the status of an orthodoxy</td>
<td>Sees the need to improve teaching and learning pedagogy for all students rather than providing remedial education across the curriculum - thus allowing an unreconstructed mainstream to proceed</td>
<td>Prefers to be called the “teaching and learning” coordinator or “learning support” coordinator; also see Dyson’s (1990) effective learning consultant</td>
<td>Responsibility of coordinator has been devolved throughout the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works only with children and young people with learning difficulties; assumes children with learning difficulties can only be taught by specialists</td>
<td>Remedial teacher now designated as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator Whole school policies</td>
<td>Tries to achieve change by incremental stages i.e. to become radical slowly</td>
<td>An explicit responsibility for developing the effectiveness of mainstream learning situations/ has some involvement in teaching children with learning difficulties</td>
<td>Subject department coordinators have formal procedures for developing inclusive practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal (individual and small group) Exclusive focus on literacy and basic skills</td>
<td>In-class support working mainly with children having learning difficulties</td>
<td>Increasingly involved in a range of whole-school issues, staff and organisational developments</td>
<td>In-class support Resource centre manager</td>
<td>English department employs a teacher with skills in SpLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches bottom stream class</td>
<td>Differentiated teaching encouraged in ordinary classrooms</td>
<td>Involve themselves in a range of non-special needs initiatives across the school</td>
<td>Member of senior management team who coordinates whole school policies</td>
<td>Working group takes decisions about deployment of support teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few formal links with mainstream teachers</td>
<td>Judicious withdrawal setting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pastoral system about supporting teaching-learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Dyson, 1993; Clark, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore, 1997)
Other aspects that emerged from this study indicate areas of concern pertinent to both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In addition to the above themes, the authors:

- Found that the ERA served to strengthen the tension between special and mainstream education. There was evidence that schools interpreted the market economy in schooling to mean that they had to make themselves attractive to parents who would judge the school primarily by examination performance;
- Found that the ERA encouraged schools to shape their provision to fit the expressed priorities of those members of their parent bodies who were most vocal. In effect this meant diverting resources away from improving the quality of teaching-learning for all students towards a clearly identifiable level of recognizable special education to individual children;
- Found that, whilst the principles of the Code of Practice were consistent with good practice and the whole school approach, in reality, the assessment framework surrounding the staged assessment process defined for schools their special needs populations and the sorts of provisions they were to make for those populations—thus effectively reversing the trend to blur the distinctions between special and ordinary and strengthening the tensions between the two;
- Found that, the Code of Practice and ERA encouraged vociferous parental lobbies to divert resources away from catering for a wide range of students towards the new disabilities such as dyslexia. Furthermore, that articulate parents usually required explanations for their children's difficulties that resulted in the perceived need for specialised programmes and specialist teaching - often taking place outside the mainstream classroom;
- Found, as a result of the implementation of the Code of Practice, that co-ordinators were becoming overwhelmed by the need to maintain and manage a bureaucratic system of individual identification, assessment and provision, thus diverting their time away from attempts to address questions of equity and participation by developing the quality of teaching-learning for all;
- Predicted a future nightmare scenario facing the education system centered around a situation in which the levels of demand from traditional forms of special educational needs remained high, resources within the education system remained under constant threat, and the level of demand from the dyslexia lobby as well as other new disabilities continued to rise.

In Northern Ireland, recent research findings1 have shown that the responsibilities, skills and attributes

1 Please note that the following section of the review of the literature contains elements that are also included in a report of a separate study conducted in the Republic of Ireland (see O’Gorman and Drudy, 2009).
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 there is fragmented support 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 with regard to 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 a number of countries. For example, Northern Ireland head teachers in mainstream and special schools studied by Abbott (2006) were indisputably committed to inclusion, but still believed that the enrolment of pupils with particular educational needs should be contingent upon a school having not only the right culture and leadership, but also the appropriate human and physical resources (limited and stretched as they are) as well as prompt, sustained support from external agencies. Research from other parts of the U.K. has also emphasized the importance of whole school participation. So too does enquiry 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 and 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).

2.2 INTERNATIONAL ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

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 impact on student learning, teachers are the single most significant source of variation and students benefit from a well educated teaching force (OECD, 2005). 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 impact on teachers’ professional lives, such as the ten common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications (EC, 2004).

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 the area of special needs must be the next challenge for supporters of inclusion and policy makers. Teachers’ skills and abilities are developed through appropriate 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 system. Teacher identity is of particular importance with regard to the education of persons with special educational needs in mainstream schools, as traditionally this has been seen to be 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 and Bones, 2006, see also O’Gorman and Drudy, 2009)

Teacher education for working in inclusive settings is still an important issue. Recent research (Anderson and
Gumus, 2006) has explored how a course in special education has impacted on general secondary 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 (i.e. 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, 2007a). 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 and 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 into a moral, visionary profession in which social and moral questions are truly explicit and embedded, and which embraces the greater, social and moral questions, rather than just teaching techniques and curriculum standards (Moran, 2007b). This approach aligns very closely with reflective practice which, as the Northern Ireland General Teaching Council for example has pointed out needs to be internalised as part of a teacher’s professional identity (see also Wearmouth, 2004 and O’Gorman and Drudy, 2009).

Embedded in a number of the recent debates about teacher education for inclusive schools and, indeed, in a number of the issues just raised above, is what has been called ‘the dilemma of difference’. The dilemma of difference consists in the seemingly unavoidable choice between, on the one hand, identifying children’s differences in order to provide for them differentially, with the risk of labelling and dividing, and, on the other hand, accentuating ‘sameness’ and offering common provision, with the risk of not making available what is relevant to, and needed by, individual children (Terzi, 2005). On the one hand, key stakeholders such as the Office for Standards in Education in the U.K. (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).

On the other hand, there are the dilemmas faced by stakeholders grappling with the very particular needs of some students.

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. Such courses explicitly challenge the processes of pathologizing ‘difference’ (and, ultimately, excluding individuals) currently operating in schools, while instigating reconstructed educational thinking and practice (Avramidis and 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 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).

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). Given the rapidity of social, economic and educational change, it has become increasing 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 and Salisbury, 2006).

As regards 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 coordinators 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 both initial and continuing education, and must encourage everyone to consider how far their own actions create barriers to inclusion (Abbott, 2007).

However, the results of a number of studies in Northern Ireland and Greece say that teacher education matters. In a field where some have questioned the impact of, or need for, professional preparation programmes, this is a significant finding (Ingvarson et al., 2007). An evaluation of a pilot programme that integrated problem-based and blended e-learning pedagogy to support student teachers learning in the area of special needs and inclusion education in Northern Ireland 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. 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 twenty-first century demands full professionalization through university-based programmes that incorporate the contextual advantages of school-based teacher education without the reproductive disadvantages of apprenticeship models (Lovat and McLeod 2006).

Northern Irish research (Smith and Barr, 2008) has argued that teacher education needs to be a transformative project where some deeply embedded and taken-for-granted beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and suppositions that inform teaching can be subjected to critical scrutiny. Professional development needs to offer teachers potential sites to express experience to engage in critical reflection about the dominant social discourses constituting organizational life (ibid.).

With regard to modes of delivery of professional development for in-career teachers, obviously university-based certificated programmes play a very 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 U.K. indicate that computer conferencing has the potential to facilitate the professional development of teachers as reflective practitioners and researchers. However, they also point to a number of 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).

A number of 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. However, they recognized
persistent and varied constraints both 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.

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 both critical and reflective and ‘unsettle’ traditional modes of operation. 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.
3 RESEARCH DESIGN, METHOD, SAMPLE, DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH TOOLS

3.1 INTRODUCTION
The focus of this comparative study was on the professional development requirements of SENCOs and Learning Support /Resource Teachers at second level (post primary) North and South. These teachers have a specific remit to work with students who have SEN in mainstream post primary school settings. The comparative element was specifically incorporated in order to maximise the contribution of the study in both contexts, and to allow each jurisdiction to gain insights from the work. The intent of the study was not to identify ‘who is doing what best’ but rather to educate, to inform, to contribute to the understanding of the challenges involved in creating appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities in special educational needs (SEN) for second level/post primary SENCOs and Learning Support /Resource Teachers in both jurisdictions. Hargreaves (2000, p. 200) calls on research to “play a more effective role in advancing the professional role and standing of teachers.” The non-evaluative approach of this study allows us to positively explore possible ways of learning from each other, and to further develop collaboration across Ireland in the development of high quality professional development for our practitioners.

3.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The study set out to gain an understanding of teachers’ perceptions of their professional development requirements, arising from the move towards more inclusionary practices in mainstream post-primary schools. As specialist teachers within schools, our participants come under increasing pressure to give SEN support to both the students and the staff on a daily basis. To expand our understanding of the current school scenario, we needed to hear the lived experience of these practitioners, and their past and present involvement with professional development. A further aim was to make recommendations that will allow the respective providers of CPD to develop appropriate programmes. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be used to assist in the adaptation and review of current professional development programmes and in the implementation in both jurisdictions of models of professional development that will be beneficial. It is through well grounded, well researched, and evidence-based professional development programmes that system capacity improves in addressing educational provision for students identified with special needs.

3.3 COMPARATIVE STUDY
Including a comparative component in any study provides perspectives that may assist the various jurisdictions in reviewing and evaluating their individual practices from a broader perspective. According to Altbach (1991), it can also bring something of an international perspective to local and national discussions and debates. Altbach also contends that a comparative element could provide guidelines, models and advice about policy and programme that can be used in specific contexts.
John (1993) suggests that comparative studies can be undertaken with a view to increasing the effectiveness of teachers in classrooms. It is important to note, however, that the uncritical transfer of particular practices may be problematic since contextual factors must always be considered (Crossley and Broadfoot, 1992). Bush, Qiang and Fang (1998) stress that, “all theories and interpretations of practice must be ‘grounded’ in the specific context before they can be regarded as useful” (p.137). Phillips (1992) also warns of the dangers of borrowing educational strategies without thorough consideration of the tactics and contextual changes necessary to “make a strategy effective” (p. 54). Kohn (1989) points out that a cross-national comparison gives each jurisdiction an important opportunity to reflect on and to evaluate its own system with greater clarity. Educators can be considerably illuminated by such a comparison. It may be that the similarities between contexts provide the key as to whether particular approaches will or will not work in another context. In fact, the similarities can provide a useful framework within which the differences between the jurisdictions can be analyzed.

There is little doubt that disciplined comparative and international research, however problematic, does have much to offer. The issue was put in perspective beautifully almost a century ago by Sadler (1900) when he expressed it thus:

We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick them into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant, but if we have endeavoured in a sympathetic spirit to understand the real working of a foreign system of education, we shall in turn find ourselves better able to enter into the spirit and tradition of our own national education, more sensitive to its unwritten ideals, quicker to catch the signs which threaten it and the subtle workings of hurtful change. (p. 49)

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN
The study combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Mixed method designs have the advantage of yielding richer, more valid, and more reliable findings than evaluations based on either qualitative or quantitative methods alone (Creswell and Plano Clarke, 2007). A further advantage is that a mixed method approach is likely to increase the acceptance of findings and conclusions by the various stakeholders, (Hammersley, 2000). When we look for generalizability of findings, quantitative data are usually needed. When we look at understanding the perceptions and reactions of the target population, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews are appropriate.

The two educational jurisdictions were chosen purposefully as the researchers knew them to be ‘information rich’ in relation to special needs (Patton, 1990, p.169). The support of students with SEN is a critical and well articulated issue as is the ongoing professional development of teachers. Two specific approaches were used: a questionnaire in the first phase, and semi-structured interviews
with a sample of the participants, in the second. The interviews were intended primarily for participants who were willing to articulate the issues uncovered in the survey more specifically. All interviews were tape-recorded and later for accuracy, clarity, and to enable cross validation of emerging themes they were transcribed. Detailed recording was a necessary component of interviews since it formed the basis for analyzing the data.

The development of the questionnaire entailed much analysis and redrafting in determining the questions for inclusion in the research. Initially, attention was focused on educational structures and perspectives in both jurisdictions which were shared and others which were at variance, exploring terminology and creating a framework of understanding. This was a valuable and necessary step in the process, providing useful information in determining the context for further development. Subsequently, specific adjustments were necessary to reflect the differences in the educational systems of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

In a subsequent stage of information gathering, a small sample of current practitioners contributed to a focus group. Interactive remote response technology was employed with two purposive samples of stakeholders to trial aspects of the questionnaire and to further inform the development of the research instruments. The use of a wide range of questioning techniques to enhance classroom pedagogy has long been established as an effective tool (Bloom, 1956; Bruner, 1986; Morgan and Saxton, 1991; Erikson, 2007). Remote Response Interactive Technology (RRIT) has been specifically designed based on such established practice and has proven to have a role in engaging students with required content; stimulating greater interaction with curriculum and providing feedback to teachers on prior learning and understanding of topics (Beatty, 2004; Burns, 2008). This technology lent itself well to the generation of questions and the interrogation of topics and issues at the piloting stage of the research. It also allowed immediate feedback on responses to, and understanding of, the questions as framed. It worked best in short bursts, interspersed with discussion, and while it was highly motivating, it did not always allow sufficient time for individual reflection, thus ruling it out as a survey tool to record valid responses. Further issues relating to privacy and group pressure and dynamics, along with technical glitches, undermined both its reliability and feasibility of RRIT, in its current form, as a tool for in-depth research.

The questionnaires facilitated the elicitation of both qualitative and quantitative data and these in turn were piloted by experienced professionals working in the area, allowing further feedback on focus, content, question structure, sequence and format (Rose and Grosvenor, 2001, p. 131). Additional work in refining these instruments was carried out, followed by further peer review of the instruments to ensure the final questions would deliver valid data. Consideration was also taken of the need to present a manageable questionnaire which respondents would not find too onerous and to present it in a format that would encourage a positive attitude to filling it
in (Denscombe, 1998, p. 96-7). The scope of the questionnaire included details on school management, geographical and social catchment, student cohorts, gender, ethnicity, SEN provision and supports. The SENCO / Learning Support/Resource Teachers’ roles and responsibilities were also sought, as were their opinions and attitudes in relation to them. Further information was also elicited in terms of teachers’ specific professional development and learning needs. Likert scales were used in a number of instances within the questionnaire format as in obtaining data on opinions, attitudes and beliefs they offer an appropriate means of recording and measurement (Oppenheim, 1992; Robson, 1993; Fowler, 1995).

The secondary research instrument, a semi-structured interview schedule, was drawn up to elicit further qualitative data, allowing for more flexible, open-ended responses and to collect data on potential unforeseen dimensions of professional development needs in the area of Special Educational Needs. “Interviewing is the preferred tactic of data collection when…. it will get better data or more data” (Dexter, 1970, p.11). The individual interviews were carried out by telephone in order to contend with time and scheduling constraints and to facilitate geographical spread.

In drawing up the interview schedule in a dual site context, it was necessary to ensure the gathering of comparable data across both educational systems. The clarity and co-ordination of pre-interview information, participant agreement and the opening script, as well as the specific interview questions, was achieved through numerous drafts and revisions and a series of pilot interviews with experienced personnel working in the area.

3.4.1 Sample selection
The project commenced with a dialogue between the researchers intended to clarify the core concepts and issues involved in undertaking a study across two neighbouring but different educational contexts. It was essential to ensure that the content of the SEN discourse was common across both jurisdictions. This dialogue showed that while there were similarities there were also some fundamental differences between the two jurisdictions in the interpretation of core concepts and praxis in the area of special education. Initial consultations were devoted to clarifying the discrepancies inherent in the interpretation of terminology used in each jurisdiction. This process of the deconstruction of individually held assumptions and the creation of a shared understanding and language of communication was an essential component of the research study.

The target population was identified as teachers with a specific remit to work with students with SEN in mainstream second level (post-primary) school settings. The research participants therefore were only those employed at this time in such special needs roles in post primary schools in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. Those who participated in the individual telephone interviews were people who indicated willingness and availability to give further in-depth responses relating to the issues and were in a position to schedule interviews within the time-frame available.
The participants were regarded as “key informants” or people who are excellent sources and who have the information necessary to answer the research questions (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003: p. 458). It was assumed that these groups of participants would also have clear and unequivocal views on the type of professional development in special needs and inclusion that would best suit their requirements. Consideration was given to the representativeness of the sample in terms of reflecting the geographical and socio-economic diversity of both jurisdictions.

3.4.2 Data collection
Two specific approaches to data collection were used: an in-depth questionnaire with a broad range of participants and one-on-one semi-structured telephone interviews with a sample of participants. The survey questions were developed to access the same information from participants in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; however, there were slight adjustments to the terminology to suit the respective contexts. All interviews were tape-recorded for accuracy and clarity. These were transcribed to allow for multiple-rater analysis. Within each site, all participants were volunteers.

The questionnaire element of the research involved a survey of second level (post primary) teachers engaged in special educational needs in both jurisdictions. The final questionnaire contained four main sections:

- Questions relating to descriptions of the school context;
- Questions relating to the students attending the school;
- Questions relating to the current roles and functions of teachers working in special education in second level (post primary) mainstream schools in Ireland;
- Questions relating to the continuing professional development needs of special education teachers working in mainstream schools in Ireland.

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.

3.5 TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS
The increasing popularity of the telephone interview as a research method may be a reflection of broader social change and technological advances. In this study, telephone interviews were used to supplement the survey questionnaire and as advocated by Scott and Morrison (2005, p. 244) a mutually satisfactory schedule was negotiated beforehand. This method is appropriate for the collection of qualitative data and, with open ended questions, allows for great flexibility, thus leading to in-depth probing and expansion.

### Table2: Data gathered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Semi-structured Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire element of the research involved a survey of second level (post primary) teachers engaged...
of ideas (Elliott, 1998). 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., 2000). Studies which directly compare telephone and face-to-face interviewing tend to conclude that telephone interviewing produces data which are at least comparable in quality to those attained by the face-to-face method (Carr and Worth, 2001; Thomas and Purdon, 1994). It is acknowledged, however, that some people respond differently in a conversation than they would on a survey. It is also acknowledged that some interviewees may respond in ways that they think the researcher wants.

While telephone interviews have been used for large surveys, they are more commonly used in smaller-scale studies, as in this case, where contact has already been made with the participants. Educational literature tends to categorise telephone interview methodology as suitable only for collecting data regarding attitudes and perceptions or items that are ‘subjective’ (Spector, 1994). Telephone interviews incur minimal cost in comparison with other research methods and a relative anonymity that appears to be less threatening to respondents encourages them to be more voluble. Other strengths of this approach are its simplicity, its validity and its flexibility, in that it can be adapted to suit the particularities of each situation. The telephone interviews also proved an important means of facilitating and tracking a wide geographical spread of opinion that was included in the research. Difficulties associated with travel-

time, busy schedules and unforeseen interruptions were eliminated through telephone interviews. The validity and reliability of the results rests primarily on the strength of the interview instrument and the technique of the interviewer. Careful preparation and piloting were invaluable in maintaining this throughout the process.

3.6 RESEARCH ETHICS
The research outline was submitted to the UCD Human Research Ethics Committee and the research was conducted according to the strictures and guidelines stipulated (http://www.ucd.ie/ofrss). 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.
4  RESEARCH FINDINGS (1)

4.1  RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUANTITATIVE DATA
Key results including commentary are presented in this section. The first sub-section concentrates on key comparisons and contrasts between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland questionnaire responses with respect to school and teacher characteristics. The second identifies key comparisons and contrasts between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland questionnaire responses with respect to special needs education policy and provision, whilst the third focuses on the roles and responsibilities of teachers North-South. The final sub-section concentrates on issues of professional learning/public development.

4.1.1  Schools and Teachers
The representation of teachers from the different school types in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: School Types Represented in Republic of Ireland and NI Samples

a) Republic of Ireland: School Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Types Represented</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Voluntary Secondary School</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational School</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community School</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee-paying Voluntary Secondary School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive School</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) NI: School Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Types Represented</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintained secondary</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled integrated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled secondary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant maintained integrated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary grammar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlled grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen, the three main school sectors in the Republic of Ireland post-primary system were represented in the sample - i.e. the vocational, voluntary and community school/college sectors - whilst, in Northern Ireland, there were 10 non-academically selective secondary schools, 8 integrated schools and 4 academically selective grammar schools. In terms of the levels of social disadvantage, the majority of the Republic of Ireland schools were not designated as schools serving disadvantaged areas. Likewise, within Northern Ireland, the majority of schools were in the two lowest free school meals bands - the measure used to determine social disadvantage within a school population in Northern Ireland is entitlement to free school meals. On the other hand, one-quarter of the Republic of Ireland sample included designated disadvantaged schools whilst only three Northern Ireland schools were in the two highest bands (having 40-50% entitlement).

The Republic of Ireland sample contained a greater number of smaller schools (under 250 pupils) whilst the Northern Ireland sample contained slightly more 1,000 plus pupil schools. However, the majority of schools in both samples held rolls within the 250-750 range.

In both jurisdictions, the communities of practice in special needs education appeared to be mostly female. Interestingly however, although small, the Republic of Ireland sample contained twice as many male SENCOs and Learning Support/Resource Teachers (16% v 8%). There were some small sample differences too in terms of teaching experience, both general and with respect to practice in the field of special needs education. Here respondents were asked to indicate their experience in terms of four categories: 0-5, 6-10, 11-20 and 21+ years teaching experience. The results suggested that the Republic of Ireland sample contained more respondents in the 6-10 year phase (21% v 13%), whereas the Northern Ireland sample contained slightly more in the 11-20 phase (34% v 31%). The Republic of Ireland sample also contained a greater percentage of teachers in the 4 -5 and 6-10 year phases. Finally, the majority of respondents in the N. Irish sample held Diploma or Masters’ level qualifications whilst in the Republic of Ireland the majority held Post-Graduate Diplomas. Over one-quarter of N. Irish teachers held no SEN qualification.

### 4.1.2 Special needs education policy and provision

A number of questionnaire items referred to school educational special needs policies as well as organisational issues concerned with special needs provision. For example, respondents suggested that all except one Northern Ireland school had a written SEN school policy. On the other hand, there appeared to be a greater percentage of schools in the Republic of Ireland sample without a written policy. Furthermore, over 60% and 70% respectively of the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland respondents suggested that they worked as an SEN team.

An interesting point of comparison between the two jurisdictions would have been the percentage of the post-primary population attending special schools and ordinary schools. However, in relation to criteria used, there are innumerable...
difficulties associated with cross-cultural comparisons of numbers of students identified as having special educational needs (Florian et al., 2006; McLaughlin et al., 2006). Furthermore, official statistics on the percentage of the post-primary mainstream school population identified as having special educational needs were not readily available. In inferring such proportionality from the sample, this difficulty arising from the use of differing criteria is further compounded by student access to mainstream schools.

Nonetheless, some interesting information arose from the questionnaires. In the case of the Northern Ireland schools, more than half of participants indicated that between 10% and 29% of the student population had been identified as having additional / special needs and, as a consequence, were participating in a graduated five-stage approach designed to match provision to educational need - see the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (DENI, 1998). Only one N. Irish school appeared to have 40% or more of their student population identified as having additional/special needs.

In the Republic of Ireland procedures for the identification and assessment of special educational needs are not as formalised as in Northern Ireland and the criteria used by teachers for determining the percentage of students identified as having additional needs is not as transparent. However, 45.6% of teachers perceived that a significant percentage of the student population had additional needs and a further 7.4% of participants indicated that over 30% of the student population had additional needs.

The majority of the Northern Ireland sample identified between 10% and 25% of their school populations as having literacy difficulties. Only one Northern Ireland respondent indicated that they would have a higher percentage than this, while, on the other hand most Republic of Ireland participants suggested that higher percentages would be more typical. Furthermore, over half of the Northern Ireland sample suggested that 25% or less of their student body would be identified as having numeracy difficulties, with over one-quarter reporting less than 10%. Two N. Irish schools reported having between 25% and 50% numeracy difficulties amongst their student body. There appeared to be higher percentages of numeracy difficulties amongst school students in the Republic of Ireland sample. Finally, in both jurisdictions, the majority of respondents used standardised tests to identify literacy and numeracy difficulties.
Table 3: Provision for SEN by LS/R/SENCo Post-Primary Teachers in Republic of Ireland and NI Schools represented in samples

a) NI: Provision for SEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision for SEN by LS/R/SENCo Post-Primary Teachers</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supported by Classroom Assistants</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal for individual instruction</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class team teaching some withdrawal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal for group instruction</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional advice from Learning Support</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of visiting teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time and special class part-time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special class full-time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class team teaching no withdrawal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No additional support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Republic of Ireland: Provision for SEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision for SEN by LS/R/SENCo Post-Primary Teachers</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal for individual instruction</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal for group instruction</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class team teaching with some withdrawal</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class team teaching with no withdrawal</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional advice from resource teacher</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time special class</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No additional support</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of visiting teacher</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time special class</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team teaching</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the tables above, across the N Ireland sample: the following were the most frequently mentioned types of SEN provision the use of classroom or Special Needs Assistants (95%); withdrawal for individual instruction (60%); in-class teaching with some withdrawal (60%) and withdrawal for group instruction (56%). The most frequently mentioned form of SEN provision within the Republic of Ireland schools was withdrawal for individual instruction. One fifth of Republic of Ireland respondents (20%) indicated that no additional support whatsoever was provided, whereas in Northern Ireland the situation was approximately 8% (2 schools). In comparison to the Republic of Ireland schools, full-time special classes and team teaching did not appear to be a feature of the N. Irish schools.

In the Republic of Ireland, withdrawal for individual tuition most frequently affected subjects such as Irish (59%), religion (17%) and modern foreign Languages (9.3
4.1.3 Roles and responsibilities
In each jurisdiction, participants were asked to rate the importance attached to a range of roles and responsibilities using a Likert-type rating scale where 1 represented the most important and 5 the least. Consequently, items having lower mean scores represented perceptions of relatively greater importance.

It has to be said that the vast majority of items were viewed as important by all the participants. Nevertheless, the tables below show the ‘top fifteen’ highest rated items - relatively speaking - for each sample. As can be seen, a few items appeared in the top fifteen amongst both samples liaising with or meeting parents; liaising with the Educational Psychology Services or EPS; making special arrangements for tests and examinations or applying for exam concessions; monitoring/advising subject teachers or collaborating with other teachers; re-assessing or monitoring student progress. The mean ratings for the roles and responsibilities are set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Mean Ratings for LS/R/SENCo Roles and Responsibilities in Republic of Ireland and NI Schools represented in samples

a) NI: Importance of Roles & Responsibilities (ascending mean ratings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Ratings for LS/R/SENCo Roles and Responsibilities</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring entitlement and access</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting parents and carers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison with Educ Psych Service</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning special arrangements</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison with external professionals</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convening reviews</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing revised CSE statements</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting positive school ethos</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-assessment of student progress</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing staff</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing stage 2 &amp; 3 interventions</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing transition process</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring / advising subject teachers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual / group assessment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting curriculum differentiation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) Republic of Ireland: Importance of Roles & Responsibilities (ascending mean ratings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Ratings for LS/R/SENCo Roles and Responsibilities</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal for small group instruction</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring student progress</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening/diagnostic tests</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying for exam concessions</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying students with SEN</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetabling additional support</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison with parents</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison with Principal</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record keeping</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal for individual instruction</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation individualised teaching</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with other teachers</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison with psychological services</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying for subject exemptions</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated by mean scores, the following items also appeared to hold relatively more importance for the Republic of Ireland sample using screening and diagnostic tests; identifying students; withdrawal for individual and group instruction; timetabling additional support; record-keeping and liaison with the Principal. By contrast, in Northern Ireland, the top fifteen items included ensuring entitlement and access; supporting curriculum differentiation; supporting a positive school ethos; liaising with external professionals and managing the transition process for students.

For both groups, the following roles and responsibilities appeared to hold lesser importance relatively speaking leading staff development or CPD for staff, governors and parents; support and training work with adults. In addition, within the Republic of Ireland sample less importance appeared to be attached to: implementing and reviewing IEPs and coordinating IEP meetings; preparing differentiated materials; team teaching; liaising with the Inspectorate and providing substitute cover. By contrast, within Northern Ireland the least important were: writing/reviewing SEN policy; analyzing data; mathematics assessment; managing budgets and resources; bidding for additional funding and acting as a role model for beginning teachers.

4.1.4 Professional development needs

Participants were asked about the contexts they used to further their professional development. Here there were some interesting Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland contrasts. For example, within the Republic of Ireland, block release to attend university appeared to be the most frequently used context (67%). On the other hand, only 39% of the Northern Ireland sample mentioned having used the university/college as a context for professional learning. As far as the N. Irish sample was concerned, the most frequently
mentioned contexts were all school-based; that is, via colleagues or help and support via the Education and Library Boards or ELBs. They reported being either “very satisfied” or “fairly satisfied” with their current CPD opportunities. Interestingly, on-line/distance education was mentioned by 27% of the Republic of Ireland sample and by only 4% (1 respondent) of the N. Irish sample.

Participants were also asked about their preferred professional learning contexts. Here, as far as the N. Irish sample was concerned, school-based learning was the preferred mode: for example, via colleagues (25%), ELB personnel (20%) and informal learning from colleagues (20%). Within the Republic of Ireland, professional learning via block release (37%) and network meetings (16%) was voiced. On-line learning did not appear to feature strongly as a mode of professional learning within either the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Ireland samples.

Using a Likert-type rating scale where 1 represented the most and 5 the least important, participants were asked to rank the importance they attributed to a number of components of a possible professional development programme - taking account of their current personal and professional situations.

Table 5: Mean Ratings for Professional Development Needs Identified by LS/R/SENCo Post-primary Teachers in Republic of Ireland and NI Schools represented in samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Ratings for LS/R/SENCo Roles and Responsibilities</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective teaching-learning</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with stress</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating SEN provision</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening counselling &amp; guidance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing time tasks &amp; priorities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of learning difficulties</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; literacy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills &amp; styles</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Education Plans</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing teachers’ SEN skills</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting motivating managing staff</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin &amp; record keeping</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships with parents</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting psychological tests</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Law &amp; SEN</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching history, geography, science</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology of SEN</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing research</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical issues in SEN</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Traveller children</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b) Republic of Ireland: Professional Development Needs (ascending mean)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Ratings for Professional Development Needs</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics for students with SEN</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language &amp; literacy</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies for students with SEN</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing materials</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School policy &amp; planning in SEN</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to other SEN teachers</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of learning difficulties</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing alternative curriculum</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting psychological assessments</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing an Education Plan</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Types of learning difficulties</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social skills training</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behaviour management</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with parents of children with SEN</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion into mainstream classes</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing collaboration skills</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin &amp; record keeping</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological development in adolescence</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speech &amp; language therapy</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT &amp; assistive technology</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student peer-collaborative learning</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health education for students with SEN</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Law &amp; SEN</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing links with special schools</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupational therapy</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing teachers’ computer skills</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching ESL</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to library facilities</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching history, geography, science</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to current journals</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological development in childhood</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Traveller children</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation skills for giving in-service</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting research in SEN</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology of SEN</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophical issues in SEN</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.34</td>
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As can be seen from the above tables, the majority of the items were viewed as important by the participants in both samples. However, the highest and lowest ranked items, relatively speaking, suggested some interesting comparisons and contrasts. For example, the following appeared within the ‘relative top ten’ of both samples: effective teaching-learning/teaching strategies; behaviour management; types of learning difficulties; language and literacy; developing education plans; developing mathematics for students identified with SEN and partnership with parents. The remaining top ten to fifteen items within
the Northern Ireland sample appeared to have a leadership and management emphasis whilst the Republic of Ireland sample spoke more to individual assessment and intervention, including social skills training and interpreting psychological assessments. More clear cut was what these special educators felt was unimportant by way of professional development. Here the social science disciplines - particularly sociology and philosophical aspects-faired relatively poorly, along with conducting research. The latter has implications for educators within higher education where the requirement to undertake and write-up extended piece of research in the form of a thesis generally remains a key indicator of academic standards. Furthermore, given the overrepresentation of Traveller children in special needs education (Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2008) the relative lack of interest in professional development around broader diversity issues, such as Traveller education, requires some additional investigation.

To summarise, the questionnaire data were gathered from a small sample of LS/R/SENCo teachers from post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. All school types were represented in both jurisdictions and, while not necessarily in proportionate terms, the sample included large and small schools and schools with disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged status. The teachers were mainly female and were experienced. Most had obtained in-career postgraduate qualifications in SEN.

While teachers acknowledged that their schools had policies on SEN, all but one of the Northern Irish schools had written policies while a much higher proportion in the Republic said they had no written policy in their school. The proportions of children identified as having special educational needs varied widely in both jurisdictions. There was a somewhat higher proportion of respondents identifying numeracy problems in the Republic than in the North. The majority of schools in both jurisdictions used standardised tests to identify literacy and numeracy problems.

Some differences in ways of working emerged. Teachers in Northern Ireland were more likely to draw on the support of classroom assistants in the mainstream classrooms while teachers in the Republic of Ireland were more inclined to withdraw children. There were also some differences in the teachers’ perceptions of the importance of their roles. Teachers in the North put an emphasis on ensuring the entitlements and access of pupils with SEN, meeting parents/carers, liaising with psychologists and planning special arrangements. Teachers in the Republic perceived as of most importance withdrawing children for small group instruction, monitoring student progress, using screening and diagnostic tests and applying for examination concessions.

There were also some differences in their perceived professional development needs. Teachers in Northern Ireland expressed a greater desire for professional development in the areas of effective teaching and learning, coping with stress, evaluating SEN provision and behaviour management, counselling and guidance. Greatest importance was placed by teachers in the Republic
on mathematics for pupils with SEN, language and literacy, teaching strategies, developing materials and school policy/planning.
5 RESEARCH FINDINGS (2)

Qualitative data analysis: Overview
The qualitative data collected emanated from a series of telephone interviews with research participants who were second level mainstream teachers from the two jurisdictions. In all, 8 interviews were conducted with teachers in Northern Ireland and 11 interviews with teachers in Republic of Ireland. 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, Manion, and Morrison, 2007).

The problem of bias and the predisposition to self-fulfilling selection by researchers was pre-empted by adopting a number of recommended qualitative data analysis techniques (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2007). To ensure consistency in interpretation a systematic set of procedures were undertaken (Seale, 2007; Silverman, 2004). Initially, a sample of eight interview transcripts from both jurisdictions formed the basis for a group analysis conducted by four of the researchers. Each researcher individually identified themes in the participants’ transcripts. Participant statements that were illustrative of the themes were then discussed 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. Simultaneously, an external interviewer reflected on the NI participant responses and provided an overview of the major themes arising in these transcripts.

The qualitative data was then put aside for a period of time to permit a fresh analysis of the data to take place on reengagement with the interpretative process. Following the time lapse, a second round of analysis and reflection by two of the researchers led to the dominant themes being listed. These were compared with the two 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 and Huberman, 1994). The subsequent themes and codes were then used by one researcher to code the transcripts by hand. A conference call discussion involving five researchers resulted in the determination of overarching categories to encompass the listed themes.

The fifth round of reflection identified two major areas with associated categories and sub-themes. Following this, two researchers coded the transcripts using MAXQDA, a computer software package enabling text segments to be labelled and collocated according to codes of 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 hand-coding and codes were refined and or made redundant as indicated to amend inconsistencies. In this
way, the data was triangulated to verify the interpretation of the researchers (Denzin and 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).

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 these categories significant subcategories emerged from the analysis. The categories of themes can be represented graphically as an economical means of reducing qualitative data (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

**Figure 2 Theme Overview**

In the following section, representative participants’ interview quotes are used to illustrate the categories and to bring the teachers’ voices to the discussion of professional development and roles.

**5.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS: QUALITATIVE DATA THEMES**

The two main themes arising from the qualitative data were comments on the roles of the teachers and comments on the professional development.
requirements of the teachers. These two areas are intrinsically linked. Professional development sought by teachers is generally based on the teacher’s role. However, professional development also has a function in informing the nature of the role. If professional development were to precisely mirror the role undertaken by the teacher, there would be stagnation and little forward movement in the progression towards a more inclusive education system. This symbiotic relationship between these two elements is not always fully understood by participants in professional development programmes who may resist exposure to topics outside those areas perceived as being immediately useful.

5.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The findings in this section can be divided into responses concerning participants’ previous experience of professional development and their comments regarding future professional development for themselves and others.

5.2.1 Prior Professional Development

In both jurisdictions all bar one NI and one Republic of Ireland participant had undertaken previous professional development in the area of SEN. The providers of the courses also varied similarly, with tertiary institutions, local organisers, Department of Education bodies (north and south) and on-line providers being cited by participants. The range of courses referred to extended from short in-service day to post-graduate diplomas and Masters degrees in SEN. Obviously participants in each jurisdiction were constrained by the availability of courses on offer. For example, the funded post-graduate diploma, which features a combination of tertiary and school based support, is only available in Republic of Ireland, and the formal cluster meetings of the Education and Library Boards are only available in NI.

I have done a Post Graduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs And I’ve done a number of other in-service courses. Done the Dyslexia, the Dyslexia Association, the Dyslexia Course, twice, and I’ve done a number of other courses on various aspects of special needs, Some of them would be organised by the local teacher centre. And some of them would be by the SESS.

Republic of Ireland 9:47-57 & 71-79

I’ve taken the dyslexia association of Ireland course. I’ve taken a pro-excel I think its called social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and then I’ve just attended in-services on mind mapping, literacy and creating reader environments and dyspraxia, IEPs. The JCSP program would have organised the literacy, creating reader environments and mind mapping. SESS organised the dyspraxia one. And NEPS I think in conjunction with the Wexford Education Centre organised the IEP. Most of them were just one day, the online course was 5 weeks I did the Diploma in Learning Support I’ve just finished my Master.

Republic of Ireland 4:8 & 42

The courses that we would go on in the South Eastern Board are done as SENCO cluster groups, and we would have around about five dates throughout each year, so in the last four or five years, I have been at, I suppose, about twenty different cluster group meetings, and
that’s to bring us up to date with SENDO legislation mostly this year, and also to do with teaching specific difficulties, such as autism and dyspraxia.

NI 8: 28

I would have taken a diploma in Special Educational Needs back in 1996, and they were organised by the Belfast Educational Library Board, and they basically went towards a module for a Masters. I also did SENCO development training foundation, and further SENCO training. I can’t remember the exact name for it, but again it was organised by Belfast Educational Library Board.

NI 7: 21

I’ve not taken anything leading to qualifications. There has been a fair amount of in-service training. I followed some to do with pupils with specific needs, such as dyslexia or autistic spectrum disorder. And some to do with administration side of things, like how to write a special needs policy. And some to do with personal development of special needs coordinator role, things like that. So it hasn’t been anything formal that I’ve taken that leads to qualifications, there has been a lot of in-service training and training provided by higher education boards.

NI 5: 20

I’ve done a Masters in Education and I’ve done an advanced diploma in special needs.

NI 2:18-19

Overall, the professional development undertaken by both sets of participants showed evidence of continued engagement in professional learning over the duration of teachers’ careers to date.

5.2.2 Provision of Professional Development

In both jurisdictions, teachers were asked to comment on desired provision of professional development. It must be remembered that participants could only reflect on what they had experienced or had a concept of as a possibility. A strong similarity marked the responses of both sectors. In particular, the recognition of the importance of sustained support was mentioned as a necessary feature of professional development. In relation to one day school based in-service, one teacher was appreciative of their value but felt the long term benefit was doubtful.

The need for grounded, relevant professional development was perceived by a number of teachers as particularly valuable.

I think actually what you’ve got to look at is a course that is fit for purpose and a lot of courses require some kind of reflection and then action within school and then evaluation of that as part of the course, as part of the assessment of course quite rightly. I think it would have to be running along during term time simply to make
the course actually fit for purpose so that there is time. If you are talking about ones professional development and going away and reflecting on it is all very well but I think you still need to have the school face experience going along at the same time which is a teacher intervention course.

NI 5:26

A model of professional development in the Republic of Ireland, where the teacher is sustained in their school practice by external support, was particularly valued by participants of the longer duration courses.

When I did my Post Graduate course I was seconded. You did either one, two, three or four weeks in Dublin, you went back into your school, and then your tutors came out, visited you in your school, and you could discuss with them the way you were using what you were learning, and even discuss with them issues you were having with students, like how would you deal with this, and that? So we felt, doing that course that that was very beneficial. You had the mixture of the theory and the practice together, and you had the hands-on help as well. And it also helped you keep in contact like with your school and whatever as well like. I found that a good way to learn because you had the practical element as well.

Republic of Ireland 9:71-79

The positive regard for this sustained support model is attested to by research findings into effective professional development. (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1992; Corcoran, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 2005)

A number of professional development providers were singled out for praise. There is a particularly good course at the moment, I couldn’t honestly tell you the name of it, but it’s in Queens, and its done online, and it’s specifically for special needs, it looks like a particularly good course

NI 8:36

The ICEP, are constantly sending me information for further development on all the courses that I’ve mentioned so far. It’s wonderful, absolutely wonderful

NI 7:29-33

While the convenience of online courses was also acknowledged and a number of respondents voiced a preference for that mode of delivery, shortcomings and disadvantages associated with them were also highlighted. These included lack of face-to-face contact with tutors; no opportunity to discuss and debate ideas with other participants in a natural environment; difficulties relating to ICT skills; and the isolating experience of working alone without the stimulation of others or the opportunity to clarify learning contemporaneously in context.

Because these courses now tend to be online, the problem of time, money, those sorts of things, are pretty well taken care of. Online courses would seem to be the way to go forward with that aspect. I suppose not having done it before, only having read about it, part of the problem would be that, when you would come across a problem, I’m not sure how you would access any tutor in face to face conversations.

NI 8:38
You do miss out on the opportunity to bounce ideas off other people. They do have these courses with chat rooms and that but its, it’s more easy to chat with people when you are in the same room I find.

NI 5:30

I suppose one of the worries that I would have, just the age bracket that I am, would I have the adequate computer skills to work online?

NI 6:38

The one I’m doing is online and I’m finding it very tough because you don’t get the same experience with a trainer and being able to ask questions and to clarify. So the online distance learning I’ve not enjoyed it at all.

NI 3:39

The online was okay. It was a lot of reading that I probably could have done without the formal doing it on the online course. Really that’s just all it was, it was reading through literature. I was hoping for something more strategy based because that’s what I’d like to learn, what strategies to implement, but that isn’t what I found on the course.

Republic of Ireland 3:39

Salmon (2004), in examining the issues relating to high quality e-learning, acknowledges the drawbacks for learners, particularly where technology is new to them.

The participant needs information and technical support to get online and strong motivation and encouragement to put the necessary time and effort in. Many participants need some form of individual technical help.

(Salmon, 2004, p. 33)

It would appear from this research that teachers in both Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland are not yet comfortable with on-line learning. Blended learning, where the dual benefits of on-line and face to face are interwoven, may be a stepping stone towards adopting a wider range of professional development opportunities.

5.2.3 Challenges to undertaking Professional Development

Participants welcomed opportunities for professional development but there were certain obstacles that made it difficult for them to avail of it. In the main, the barriers to undertaking professional development emanated from respondents from Northern Ireland. This perhaps is due to a DES funded model of PD provision being available in Republic of Ireland where teachers are substituted for considerable periods to undertake tertiary-based PD in SEN.

The cost of professional development and the demands on their time were repeatedly mentioned by participants.

There is a course and it’s run in the south and I know its €300 and that’s on line. It looks at everything from behaviour management to psychology, which actually looked very good, but again it was the money and I also think probably I would like some face to face time as well as opposed to studying online totally.

NI 2:29

I think the barriers would be financial and time. I mean in the great majority of professions you are not expected to pay
for your own professional development. But you are if you are in education. That’s one issue, and time pressures obviously would be the other.

NI 5:32

They’re on offer by private companies who charge quite a lot and also if you live in Northern Ireland you have to get to places, like London or Birmingham or Manchester which is quite a cost for the school if they want to have me professionally developed in that aspect.

NI 1:35

The reality is that you have to try and fit in as many short half day or one day courses, including Saturdays, where you can, that’s the reality. Time out from teaching would be a good thing for someone taking on this role.

NI 4:28

Lack of substitution was also found to be a serious barrier in some instances.

NI 3:49

Your teaching commitments to the school sometimes make it difficult to go to particular events.

NI 1:37

Such issues of cost and time have long been established as factors impacting on teacher uptake of professional development, (Little, 1993; Hargreaves, 1990, 1993; Garet et al, 2001). Where opportunities for professional development were provided by education bodies, there was an appreciation of the support given.

And also of course the board has been very good in providing courses, We meet pretty regularly over the course of the year. They would target certain areas such as say dyslexia or ADHD or Asperger’s, behavioural problems, and tend to go through a certain cycle with these.

NI 4:30

Throughout the interviews in both sectors, there was an overwhelming sense of teachers exploring available professional development opportunities and undertaking a continuous programme of enhancement of their skills.

5.2.4 Benefits of professional development

Participants’ comments on the benefits of professional development undertaken suggested that the impact was not only on their teaching but also on their understanding of their role and their sense of self-efficacy.

I feel that I’m better informed, so I’m better able to explain, or to put it back to the teacher. And I think, for me, the fact that I’m more and better informed certainly has a bearing on how I do my work, a huge bearing.

Republic of Ireland 4:228 & 238

The empowering impact of the extended professional development course was a recurring feature in teachers’ narratives.

It was excellent - we felt, finishing it, that at least we had the wherewithal to go out and have some authority for the work we were doing.

Republic of Ireland 9:409
One of the teachers without a qualification in SEN perceived that her input to staff on inclusive practices would carry little weight.

*I reckon that if on staff development days someone came down and actually spoke about the benefits of things, the new way people are thinking, I think that would help because they see it as just me being a little upstart, trying to change things.*

Republic of Ireland 6:160

This contrasts strongly with the self efficacy in this regard observed in remarks by teachers who had the graduate qualification in SEN.

*I've done in-services around behaviour and around specifically ADHD and mild general learning difficulties with our own staff in school, because we tend to forget that they don't have the more in-depth knowledge that we have.*

Republic of Ireland 8:36

Teachers’ capacity to embark on a proactive whole school inclusive approach on foot of the professional qualification in SEN was noted in the interviews. This is an account of how, in the wake of her extended course, a teacher planned professional development for the school and felt sufficiently confident to ensure that colleagues took on board responsibility for all students in their classes.

*I organised it [an in-school in-service] for a whole staff, and, and I, you know, pushed for it, and it was a fantastic success and I'd love to build on that. I think just even the fact that I've done a little bit of further study myself, and I've done more reading around the whole thing, I'm more aware of what was happening, and I suppose I'm more able to curtail that [teachers reneging on responsibility for students with SEN] to a certain extent.*

Republic of Ireland 4:230

This capacity building in school is an indication of the potential of structured professional development to become a key strategy for future whole school engagement in SEN.

Other professional development that was of shorter duration and could be interpreted as being of limited impact.

*I've done a few, I can't remember, I know that another teacher that's working with me also would have done one recently in the same area. I would have done the Wordsworth program for teaching dyslexia. I would have done another one in the Blackrock Teacher Centre. And now there are others but I can't remember now. They last a day generally.*

Republic of Ireland 10:14-16

Teachers who had availed of professional development were positive about their participation

*I find them particularly good in relation to helping with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia problems associated with behaviour and ADHD and, autism, Asperger syndrome - you name it really.*

NI 4:22

I have a professional qualification which helps me with the managerial side of special educational needs, in managing the special needs teachers, and the
classroom assistants within the school, NI 7:25

I’ve been on that diploma course which was specifically for SENCO so it’s natural that I would be taking a lot of my ideas of the SENCO role from that course. And that certainly would have widened my ideas of the scope of the SENCO and also would have helped me to see areas in which the SENCO should be delegating, that all staff should be involved and so on.

NI 1:115

Others stressed the value of professional development in maintaining their skills and up-to-date knowledge in the area of SEN.

I think its important that I develop my own knowledge so that the provision and the information that I can provide for staff can be more if you like hitting the nail on the head.

NI 6:134

I prefer doing them in the summer I prefer something that’s a little longer, I found the course that I learnt, the most from was the Dyslexia Association of Ireland course. I found that because it was over 4 weekends. Sometimes in a one day course you just, scratch the surface and I know all the surface things. It’s getting into the deeper into issues that I’d like to do. So I find longer courses are better.

Republic of Ireland 3:11 -13, 19, 23-27, 39

A factor emerging from these research findings was the evidence that professional development courses which led to additional qualifications were found to impact on teacher efficacy. In general, the teachers who were interviewed and had additional qualifications tended to show particular confidence in their ability to carry out their roles. This link between professional development and self-efficacy was also noted internationally (Wise, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Billingsley (2004) also identified this as important in continuing effectiveness in the area of Special Needs.

5.2.5 Professional development: future requirements

The comments from participants on the type of professional development required can be divided into that sought for themselves and that sought for colleagues. The range of professional development sought by teachers was diverse and tended to reflect the current needs of the students in their schools or those of incoming students.

I think there’s more and more students coming into the schools and more and more of them have special needs that need to be met and they are not being met. It’s getting more and more difficult for schools to meet those needs and for teachers in general.

Republic of Ireland 10: 111

It depends very much on the kind of child coming into the school where we are pre-warned about a child with a particular difficulty. For example say at the moment we don’t have anybody with Asperger’s syndrome, and I’m aware of different aspects of that, but I would want to have a more in-depth awareness and knowledge of it and how to cope with it should we have somebody coming in with that particular problem.

NI 4:26
The desire to undertake courses relevant to the needs of current and incoming pupils was mentioned as a factor in pursuing professional development in SEN.

I did the Diploma in Special Needs and two or three courses on dyslexia or dyspraxia by Tralee Teacher Centre. Maybe there'd be one a term, and I'd generally go to them, especially if I knew there was a student coming in with the problem, or a student we had, had the problem they were dealing with. I would go to them at night at a local education centre in Tralee. Republic of Ireland 5: 19-25

In expressing their need and desire for professional development, teachers often related it directly to their particular school needs.

I suppose the main area that we have to develop, will probably be in dealing with behavioural issues. A considerable number of our Statements that youngsters are coming through to us with behavioural difficulties, lined up with the fact that there's an awful lot more youngsters with ADHD and things like that, and also autism, and Asperger's sometimes impinges upon behaviour.
NI 8:30 – 32

I would like to develop my teaching of literacy skills because I feel that we're getting a lot more children coming up with very poor reading skills and this bars them a lot of the time from the curriculum and I would like to be able to push some children forward with reading skills and I feel that I'm lacking in that.
NI 2:25

So just training about the various needs of which there are many now - Asperger's, ADHD that would be one thing I think. You need to be fairly confident. I can't assess every need but I need to have some idea what it involves and what the problems will be.
NI 1: 41

Courses, such as Specifics in Special Needs, Dyslexia or Autism. Because things are changing as the years go by, and as you go along there are more and more different diagnosis for different special needs - so just keeping up to date on all the new sort of fangled diagnosis for special needs would be the sort of development training that I would like to participate in.
NI 7:25

I feel it would be beneficial to widen my knowledge of various conditions that children may experience going through their secondary education with special needs.
NI 6:26

We've quite a high percentage of children on the special needs register, with a wide range of needs that need to be addressed.
NI 6:26

In Republic of Ireland, the issue of developing IEPs was mentioned by a number of teachers.

I don't think IEPs are touched, you know, how to write them up. Everyone says the targets should be small and clear, but what does that mean in a secondary school context? Well everybody seems to be flapping about them! It's coming into
law, and nothing has been given. I know we got the guidelines and things like that, but nothing definite has been told to us.
Republic of Ireland 6:14-18

I’d like to do more in relation to IEPs seeing as they’re coming on board next year. I’d just like to find out latest techniques, things that are working, particularly in the area of autism because I think that’s the area that we’re going to need most help in because we’re getting more students with those kinds of difficulties. Also dysphasia because we’re seeing more and more of those children.
Republic of Ireland 11:26

In NI the area of assessment was identified as a specific need by one participant.

The area that I would like to develop is to do with assessing children for examination concessions.
NI 1:29

However, the related area of IEPs did not arise as a distinct professional development need. NI respondents appeared to be at ease with this area, one teacher declaring that.

Yes the teachers are updated with IEPs, and the Register is available to all teachers, substitute teachers included. There are profiles of all of the special needs youngsters in our school, so they are fully aware of the Register and the Code of Practice.
NI 8:106

In some instances, the type of professional development sought displayed an awareness of issues beyond the immediate setting.

I think it’s important that I develop my own knowledge, and during the coming years take a number of courses hopefully to develop that knowledge, so that the provision and the information that I can provide for staff can be more, more like hitting the nail on the head because I’ve a greater range of knowledge.
NI 6:134

But actually at this point in my career I feel I want to move into doing something along the lines of counselling, to support what I already do. Just to develop some counselling skills that help me to, be better able, able to cope with what is always coming at us.
Republic of Ireland 4:46

Thus the generality of the professional development requests from teachers tended to focus on specific disability issues which reflected student-deficit thinking. There were few requests focusing on curriculum related issues or in developing new pedagogical strategies. It is also noteworthy that, excluding input on developing IEPs, the professional development requested from both political entities was strikingly similar. Given the longer history of inclusive education in NI the parallel of the responses from the two jurisdictions is remarkable.

5.2.6 Professional development sought for others

The isolation that can be experienced by teachers who have responsibility for special educational needs has previously been noted in much of the literature.
As the only person in a building responsible for providing a particular service, many special educators experience a high degree of autonomy, perhaps more than they would like. (Clarke-Chiarelli and Singer, 1995)

During the course of the interviews with second level teachers in both Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, the pressing need for professional development in SEN for the whole school staff was frequently iterated.

I’m trying to push a whole school involvement in special needs, not just me as the one who solves all, but at the end of the day they are there to follow a curriculum and do exams in second level. And unless they can do that with all their teachers being isolated with me it isn’t solving any problem. I think the biggest problem now is the lack of training for the mainstream teachers.

Republic of Ireland 7:56, 180

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. We need to help teachers to become more comfortable with the idea that they actually are teaching them, they actually are doing the work, but maybe help them to develop their skills also.

Republic of Ireland 4:12, 26

The whole drive in terms of our attitude towards education is inclusion and everybody being a teacher of literacy and a teacher of numeracy and so on. In practice because of time and pressures and people and so on it doesn’t, people are not thinking on those lines, they are not thinking of themselves as special educational needs teachers, when of course they are meant to be.

NI 4:110

Sometimes we have difficult conversations about children and obviously with maybe more children coming into school with difficulties that we wouldn’t have encountered 5 years ago, and sometimes the staff feel frustrated because they feel that this is something that they maybe weren’t trained to teach or trained to do, so its reassuring to staff that we’re all in the same boat together and that it’s a learning process as we go along.

NI 2:49

I can go off and I can do my course maybe, as I said, at a weekend or whatever, but there needs to be more whole school development, or in-service training.

Republic of Ireland 9:189-191

if every mainstream teacher could do that course, that would be the ideal. Because what you learn, what we learned from that course is useful to you, no matter what kind of students you’re teaching I mean every mainstream teacher has special needs students in their class so, it’s the kind of course every teacher should be doing ideally.

Republic of Ireland 9:397-405

I think sometimes they don’t know enough and this might be a shortcoming on my part but they don’t know enough about what we can do to support children.

NI 5:78
This desire for whole school professional development was emphasised time and again by participants. Interestingly, the suggestion that the SEN teacher be responsible for this upskilling of colleagues was only infrequently offered as a resolution to this dilemma. However, in both sectors there was evidence of a dawning realisation that the SEN teacher had much to offer colleagues in terms of support.

I think from a whole staff point of view, thinking as Resource Teachers, we tend to forget that the knowledge and experience that we have gained isn’t necessarily the knowledge and experience of other teachers in the school. And I think in general, right across the board, in the vocational sector, that it would be absolutely no harm for every teacher to have these strategies. I’ve done in-services around behaviour and around specifically ADHD and mild general learning difficulties with our own staff in school, because we tend to forget that they don’t have the more in-depth knowledge that we have, they don’t have the strategies that just come straight off the top of their head, and I think teachers should have that, every teacher should have it.

Republic of Ireland 8:192

The value of whole school professional development in SEN and inclusion was emphasised by one Northern teacher, referring to a programme that had been in place at one time, but was now no longer in available.

I think DENI did something good when the code came out because they did training for all staff, and they did some work for the principals. Maybe its time they went back and did that. That was very, very important.

NI 3:127

It appeared that the provision of professional development for colleagues was a stronger feature of NI teachers’ roles.

Many NI teachers with responsibility for SEN take on the additional duty of contributing to the professional development of their colleagues, but this is not without its challenges.

(2007) suggest that one of the roles for the LS/R teacher is as a source of professional development for colleagues within the school. Ensuring that attention is paid to this aspect of the role is a key requirement of professional development courses in SEN. For one of the teachers this was a aspiration.

I would love to come in to classrooms with new members of staff, who haven’t been in this school before, and equip them with the skills that they need and work with them to accommodate the students with special needs in the school.

Republic of Ireland 8:192

This is underpinned by comments relating to the perceived role of the LS/RT within the school. Teachers’ self perception of their role does not appear to include this aspect of collegial up-skilling and, indeed, it may be supposed that when many teachers first undertook to work in this area it was not a feature of the job description. However, the recent ‘Guidelines on the Inclusion of Children’ Department of Education and Science
I try not to ask them to do too much. I think sometimes we are asking teachers to change their approach. Not now in this school but in my last school in particular, that was a real issue because that’s what I’ve been doing for 20 years and you are telling me I’ve got to do something different. So I think there can be resistance.

I’m cascading my knowledge somehow. I’m not sure if they hope that every teacher will be their own little SENCO if you like in 10 years time. I see the job as becoming a full time job in itself because of the amount of work and putting all the legalities of IEPs and annual reviews and so forth into place, I’m doing that, I guess.

Some of them see me as the boss when it comes to special needs and I’ve had to say to them, no, I’m really the consultant, you go ahead and do whatever you think is right.

We do it sometimes by inviting somebody from the board, for example, to address teachers on special educational needs and particular special educational needs like dyslexia for example. I would sometimes get an educational psychologist to come and give an address. Or somebody from the board who specialises in behavioural problems or in Asperger’s syndrome or ADHD from time to time, depending on the needs in that particular year. But again that has to be squeezed into our staff development time and there are a lot of issues associated with staff development all jostling for a place.

Classroom Assistants see me as their line manager, I organise their timetables and training and things like that, so they would come to me with any issues.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) stress the value of building collaborative environments in schools in which teachers provide each other with assistance as they work together towards a common goal and endeavour to improve and change instruction. Such peer coaching can help build a professional culture that supports teachers, increases knowledge and responds to all students across a range of needs, (Kovic, 1996; Banks et al, 1999; Swafford, 2000).

A number of respondents from both sectors identified the lack of awareness of the needs of students with SEN amongst their colleagues and the lack of understanding of the requirements of inclusion as issue of concern.

It may be inferred from the comments recounted here that the type of professional development sought by the SEN teachers for their colleagues focused on adaptive pedagogy. This is in contrast to the professional development sought by SEN teachers for themselves which seemed to be more influenced by student deficit led thinking.

Overall, there was an emergent consensus on the desirability of whole school engagement in inclusive education and the provision of professional development in SEN for all staff. However, the understanding of who might provide this professional development for colleagues varied from presumed external sources.
to an acknowledgement that it fell within the remit of the SEN teacher. This is a significant step forward as it indicates a shift in perception from viewing special education as being on the periphery of the ordinary school towards being a pervasive element throughout the school. This shift is in line with the stated objective of education policy in both jurisdictions which promote inclusive education.

5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS: SEN TEACHERS’ ROLES

This section examines the roles of teachers in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. In the main, a sense of greater variation within each jurisdiction than between each jurisdiction emerged. There was a sense that many of the comments from the interview participants could have been attributed equally to either jurisdiction. In both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the approach to support appears to have developed in a rather idiosyncratic manner in accordance with the individual school’s view rather than in accordance with the guidelines from the respective departments.

5.3.1 Perception of the role

It would appear that the role of the SEN specialist teacher may be perceived differently depending on the context. There also appears to be a lack of clarity around the role in terms of the day to day work in schools. Participants feel that the respective Departments of Education in Republic of Ireland and NI have not really clarified the role.

*I think the Department nearly see themselves now just in terms of, allocating the resource hours, and then more or less you look after yourself after that.*

Republic of Ireland 9: 333

*I think when the whole idea of the Resource Teacher was envisaged that there weren’t clear guidelines given to the management of the schools as to how best to use this new resource that they were being given, so each school seems to have a different way of timetabling. Each school seems to have a different emphasis on the level of responsibility.*

Republic of Ireland 8:273

*I don’t really think they [DENI personnel] have a full grasp and understanding of what life is like, not just for teachers but for the children as well.*

(NI 2:63)

As shown below, the person in the role had a somewhat different interpretation of the role than had the school. This is illustrated by the comment where the individual’s ‘role’ appears to have changed without any consultation or discussion. It would appear that the role changed in name only and the teacher continued to be viewed as a remedial teacher within the school.

*For a long time I thought I was a Remedial Teacher, and then suddenly somebody started calling me a Learning Support Teacher.*

Republic of Ireland 2:309

The focus of the role may also be different. Although this next participant is aware of the many functions attached to the role, he/she sees the primary function as one of boosting self-esteem.
Open any of those books, and there’s a list a mile long of the roles and responsibilities of the Learning Support Teacher. I would see my greatest role as helping children in areas of self esteem. You know they’re constantly failing for whatever reasons, and it’s to build up their self esteem, to try and tailor a programme that suits each individual student, which is grand in theory, but not so easy.

Republic of Ireland 4: 260 & 76

The participants noted above, although in the same role within their respective schools, are likely to have very different approaches when dealing with pupils.

Other participants talk more of the vision of the role and how this needs to be communicated to staff, students and parents.

I think you have to have a very very clear vision of what you want, and move forward with that. I think you have to place yourself on the map with the students and parents alike. You have to place yourself on the map with your own colleagues, and if you’re not able to do that, you will sit in a corner and nothing will get done or very little will get done.

Republic of Ireland 8:335

I try to act more as a consultant rather than a manager.

NI 5:36

One participant sees the role as having a central focus that has taken over his/her life. Another has a very mixed role.

My main role at the moment is to access the resources for the school, but that has just taken over my life.

Republic of Ireland 7:56

I would see myself as half and half, half a classroom teacher and half an administrator person who’s just doing the paper work and doing the tracking and documentation and all that.

Republic of Ireland 3:113

The varying interpretations of the role appears to support Forlin’s (2001) argument in Australia that devising a list of responsibilities that are excessively broad and unmanageable is unlikely to assist in better defining the role. Forlin further asserts that the role should remain flexible so that the unique needs of each school population can be met effectively.

5.3.2 Skills necessary to undertake the role

This particular category was intended to provide an overarching structure for the skills area. However, much of what the participants identified in this area might be described best as attributes rather than skills. It may be that the participants regard these personal attributes as an essential foundation to undertaking the role. A skill may be regarded as an ability or specific expertise that enables a person to perform an activity very well. This proficiency or facility is acquired or developed generally through training or experience. An attribute, on the other hand, is a quality or characteristic inherent in the person. This finding is interesting in relation to the emphasis on teacher competences and qualifications (EC, 2005).

Some responses are noted below. Attributes such as level-headedness and empathy were identified across both jurisdictions. The following illustrates...
what attributes participants feel are necessary for the role.

I think you need to be able to get on well with your colleagues on the staff because sometimes you may be having to politely point out that something hasn’t been done or that they need to do a certain thing. So you need to have probably fairly good people skills for working with the children and parents, but even more I think for relating to other staff members.

NI 1:43

A sense of humour; somebody who is flexible in their thinking; somebody who can empathise with parents.

NI 2:35

Diplomacy is awfully important.

Republic of Ireland 10:74

I found that, motivating classroom assistants, special needs teachers and teachers is a massive part of my job, so motivating qualities, leadership qualities, decision making qualities, are part of the massive role that I have, and one which can be quite difficult at times.

NI 7:45

Patience, is a quality that you need

Republic of Ireland 3:79

You need lots of energy!!!

Republic of Ireland 9:129

In terms of actual skills, organization, time management, and an ability to deal with loads of paperwork appear very frequently as these are perceived to be key for the role. Arguably, these are not necessarily key skills that are taught in either pre-service or in-service teacher education programmes.

A clear and organised mind. Good filing system.

Republic of Ireland 10:74

Definitely organizational skills, time management.

Republic of Ireland 1:56

You need to be able to cope with the deluge of paperwork that accompanies a lot of SEN situations.

NI 4

An awful lot of the SENCO’s role is clerical.

NI 8:46

It is interesting to note that there was little reference to curriculum knowledge although it was mentioned that knowledge of student difficulties would be helpful along with an ability to respond to teachers’ and parents’ questions.

I think you need a good knowledge of the difficulties that the students have.

Republic of Ireland 7:70

I apply for all the grants and buy in all the resources. So you need to have an idea of what resources are good and not good.

Republic of Ireland 3:81

I would work very closely with the deputy principal whom I would regard sort of as my line manager and she would be very supportive. She also then looks for me to advise on certain situations like a child coming to the school with special needs.

NI 1:47

5.3.3 Barriers to the role

Of particular note here is that the issue of time in relation to the workload and the overwhelming amount of paperwork
that is attached to the role presents very strongly for participants in both jurisdictions. The general bureaucracy and the conflicting demands on the role are very evident. This would be consistent with Abbott’s (2007) findings that the role has become strongly managerial and that the workload as defined by the government is extremely challenging.

Administration is massive. The amount of paperwork involved in special needs now is just out of control.
NI 7:45

I would love if they would make a proper ruling in terms of how much time a SENCO is allowed for their work.
NI 3:97

Curriculum restrictions and the amount of time one is expected to do paperwork. You know in theory you can apply the curriculum, but in practice in a secondary school like this with a timetable system operating it’s not always that easy to do.
NI 5:70

I’m not allocated any time within the curriculum timetable for the SENCO responsibilities, and I feel it would certainly be beneficial to have some time specifically allocated to you for those duties.
NI 6:52

In spite of all the reservations and concerns about the role, the paperwork and the bureaucracy, the participants are very positive about their work. There are also schools in which the role has been implemented very effectively. This is most encouraging.

I love the work, I just wish there was more time, time that I would rather be using to do the programmes with the kids.
Republic of Ireland 11:144

I’ve been given quite a significant amount of time to work and I meet the principal once a week for 40 minutes to discuss special needs issues. And we’ve probably got special needs on the staff meeting once a month. So time is put in because its, very high profile in our school.
NI 3:63

One area that emerged as a concern for participants across both jurisdictions is IEPs. There would appear to be some confusion as to who is responsible for them within the school. The amount of time needed to develop them, especially if they do not appear to be used effectively, is problematic for some. This would suggest that training for all teachers in the writing and implementation of IEPs is essential. It is also indicative of the need for a whole school approach so that there is a clear delineation of responsibility for the IEP and its ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

I think sometimes you are writing IEPs and you wonder do they read the damn things.
NI 3:81

I’m very concerned about IEPs now when that comes into play, 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.
Republic of Ireland 7:106
Connected to the IEPs is the issue of ‘reasonable accommodations’ and the time and paperwork required in the application. Details of this process can be found at www.examinations.ie.

It is likely that this also takes time away from actually working with pupils and teachers.

The biggest problem is the form filling for these accommodations.
Republic of Ireland 5:235

In summary, these participants are all positive about their roles in spite of any of the perceived downsides. It would appear that some clarification around the allocation of time for the role would help to make it more consistent across school.

5.3.4 Roles challenges
The lack of engagement by others in the teaching of students with SEN was perceived as being a major challenge by the teachers interviewed. This is also indicative of the need for a whole school approach identified by Arnaiz and Castejon (2001).

As one teacher noted

*We look after those students who have difficulties and maybe it’s just that other members of the staff are abdicating on their responsibility.*
Republic of Ireland 10:88

There was a noted tendency for colleagues to assume that they were not accountable for students with special needs and that these students were solely the remit of the LS/R teacher.

A parent would walk in the door to me, and just say to me out of the blue “Mr. So and So sent me over to you because Mary is not doing well in English.” I wouldn’t have any idea of this beforehand, there would have been no consultation, no conversation, no anything about this, and it was a matter of my job being to solve all the problems of children that weren’t performing in school, and I did feel dumped upon.
Republic of Ireland 4: 228

Sometimes you may be having to politely point out that something hasn’t been done or that they need to do a certain thing so you need to have good people skills.
NI 1:43

Motivating classroom assistants, special needs teachers, and teachers is a massive part of my job which can be difficult at times.
NI 7:45

As noted in the literature review (p.16), the leadership role of the SENCO or resource teacher has been emphasised in a number of countries. Since the role does not generally have the authority attached to it comparable to a principal of vice principal, it could be argued that it is not the responsibility of this individual to ensure that teachers are doing their job in relation to students with special or additional needs since that is a role that belongs to the specific school administrators. In addition, to be assigned to the role of motivator or to feel that this is a necessary part of the job also requires scrutiny.

A sense of being overwhelmed by an increasing case load pervades many of
the interviews. This is consistent with one of the major themes identified in the international literature as it is evident in a number of countries. Since we are seeing an increasing number of students with special and additional needs entering the secondary school system, it is essential that all teachers, including those in resource and support roles, have the skills necessary to make this work effectively. As noted earlier and worth reiterating: “The school’s ethos and the teachers’ beliefs have a considerable impact on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion which, in turn, are translated into practice” (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002, p.140). Cook (2007) emphasised the need for newly qualified teachers to have the skills necessary to meet the needs of all learners. The same goes for experienced and long standing teachers in the system, many of whom have not had students with additional needs in their classes previously.

This appears to be related to the rising number of students with special needs entering mainstream post-primary schools; the difficulty of defining the role boundaries of the LS/R teachers; and the continuation of a medical model of disability where students with special needs are perceived as being in need of ‘specialist teaching’ which is the province of the LS/R teacher alone.
In general, it would appear that current practitioners are concerned not only about their professional development but also about their role, what it entails and the skills necessary to fulfil that role successfully. These two areas are interconnected as the professional development needs are likely to be expressed within the framework of the role as it is implemented within the participant’s particular context.

Evidence emerging from these research findings on professional development suggests that courses which led to additional qualifications had an impact on teacher efficacy. In general, the teachers who were interviewed and had additional qualifications tended to show particular confidence in their ability to carry out their roles. This link between professional development and self-efficacy was also noted internationally (Wise, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Billingsley (2004) also identified this as important in continuing effectiveness in the area of Special Needs.

The findings from this research suggest that teachers value the interaction of both theory and practice in professional development programmes. This is attested by international research.

According to Darling-Hammond:

> Recent evidence also indicates that reforms of teacher education creating more tightly integrated programs with extended clinical preparation interwoven with coursework on learning and teaching produce teachers who are both more effective and more likely to enter and stay in teaching. An important contribution of teacher education is its development of teachers’ abilities to examine teaching from the perspective of learners who bring diverse experiences and frames of reference to the classroom. (Darling-Hammond 2000: 166)

Other evidence from both NI and Republic of Ireland in this research points to a desire for whole school professional development and a desire for more collaborative approaches to SEN. This would indeed benefit all students, particularly those identified as having special educational needs. Moreover, research suggests that collaborative environments have the potential to benefit teachers by preventing burnout, heightening teachers’ sense of efficacy, and improving teachers’ knowledge base (Brownell, et al 1997).

The area of special education is an evolving one. There is evidence of a move from segregated provision for students with special educational needs to a more inclusive system where all students are educated together irrespective of their perceived differences. The increasing number of students identified as having special educational needs in the ordinary schools as recounted by the participants in these interviews is a testament to this changing climate. Current practices in this changeover period are likely to undergo further adaptations. Thus the professional development sought by teachers currently may not reflect the requirements of potential situations that will emerge. Furthermore professional development that merely reacts to
situations will not provide the stimulus for informed debate about possibilities of as yet undreamed practices. There is a need for professional development to enter a symbiotic relationship with practice where each informs the other.

6.1 COMMENTARY
As suggested previously, the comparative element in this research was primarily undertaken with a view to enabling each jurisdiction to gain insights from the work and to maximise the contribution of the study within both contexts. The principal aim of this commentary is to shine a critical lens on both the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland educational special needs systems with a view to identifying relevant future policy and practice issues. As Kohn (1998) suggested, cross-national comparisons provide each jurisdiction with an important opportunity to reflect on, and to evaluate, its own system with greater clarity.

Our argument runs as follows. Making use of insights derived from the Innovatory Mainstream Practice detailed in the literature review, we will suggest that, at a surface level, the roles and responsibilities of post-holders having a specific remit for special needs education within each jurisdiction lie at different stages of development. On the other hand, to make value judgements about such differences would be a fundamental mistake; that is, to fail to take account of socio-political contexts when making cross-cultural comparisons. As intimated by Phillips (1992), Bush, Qiang and Fang (1998) - context was everything! It would also demonstrate a serious failure to take account of the methodological limitations of this research.

On the basis of our analysis to date, we will then argue that the results of this piece of research suggest that, as far as Northern Ireland is concerned, much less progress has been made towards an extended and developmental role for the SENCO than one might have expected or wished for; that is, given the facilitating policy climate for human rights and inclusion. Furthermore, it should be placed in the context of progress made since the mid 90s when, in preparation for the introduction of the Code of Practice, Dyson (1996) was commissioned by the Department of Education to undertake a base-line of N. Irish practice. We will speculate that, whilst differing in some surface practices, the deep cultures of schooling (Corbett, 1999) within both jurisdictions share some very powerful common discourses that serve to maintain the status-quo and limit the space for creative and pluralistic struggle. Finally, the challenges of this for creating appropriate professional development and change will be briefly outlined.

6.1.1 Meeting Special Educational Needs in the ordinary school: some cross-cultural conclusions
In light of the insights garnered from the literature review, what are we to make of the following comparative data? For example, in the Republic of Ireland:

- The relatively higher importance attached by this sample to screening and diagnosis and the desire for professional development in individual assessment, interpreting psychological assessments and social skills training;
As a form of special needs education, the more frequent use made of withdrawal for individual and group instruction;

- The relatively lower importance given to team teaching and preparing differentiated materials;

- The relatively lower importance given to issues of entitlement and access;

- The comparative lack of whole school policies for special needs education;

- The relatively lower importance attached to implementing and reviewing individualised education programmes;

- The focus on remediating basic skills of literacy and numeracy;

- The percentage of students reported to be receiving no additional support whatsoever;

- The desire, detected within the qualitative data, for responsibility for special needs to be better embedded within the mainstream curriculum. This was given expression through the call for whole school approaches and for mainstream teachers not to renege on their responsibilities for meeting the needs of students identified as having educational special needs;

- The desire for special needs work to be better embedded throughout the school, albeit perceiving the necessary task of professional development as being someone else’s responsibility.

Then in Northern Ireland:

- The greater use made of in-class support via the deployment of Classroom Assistants where we suspect (from our practical experience even though it is not clear from this data) Classroom Assistants are mostly, but not exclusively, deployed to work with identified students rather than any student who needs help at a particular time;

- The less frequent use made of withdrawal for individual and group instruction;

- The relatively greater importance attached to ensuring curriculum entitlement and access;

- The relatively greater importance attached to supporting curriculum differentiation;

- The relatively greater importance attached to encouraging a supportive whole school ethos;

- The relatively greater importance attached to collaborative working with external professionals;

- The relatively greater concern for supporting the transition process for students;

- The perception that the assessment procedures associated with the Code of Practice represented something of a bureaucratic nightmare;

- The greater desire for school-based professional development via colleagues, ELB personnel and informal learning from colleagues; the latter suggesting a more two-way and permeable relationship between SEN and subject specialists;

- The greater desire for professional development having a focus on leadership and management issues.
From the snapshot of practice generated by our research, it is extremely difficult, if not somewhat imprudent, to try to provide an overall comparative picture of the states of special needs education both North and South. Nevertheless, taking account of the framework derived from the work of Dyson and his team outlined above, in addition to their caveat suggesting that it may be misleading to speak about a pure special needs approach or, for that matter, a co-ordinator role (since resolutions to the diversity dilemma overlay each other), we would conclude that the current roles, presently undertaken by designated teachers in the two jurisdictions, reflect resolutions to the task of meeting special educational needs in the context of the ordinary school that are at different stages of development.

With regard to the situation in the Republic of Ireland, the empirical evidence from this piece of research suggests to us that the designated role is currently shaped by many of the features characteristic of the old remedial model overlaid with some movement towards a whole school approach; albeit a whole school approach circumscribed by the context created by the EPSEN Act - more of which will be said later. Thus the terminology describing the role holder as a Learning Support teacher must appear somewhat confusing to many practitioners, representing, as it appears to do, more of a system’s aspiration than actual practice in the schools.

With regard to the situation in Northern Ireland, the empirical evidence from this piece of research suggests that practice in currently shaped much less by earlier remedial teacher thinking than a whole school approach of sorts; that is, one circumscribed by the contexts created by ERA and the Code of Practice. When Dyson, some fifteen years ago, first reported on the state of Special Needs Education in Northern Ireland, he concluded that policy and practice in N. Irish schools was not based on a model that was aligned with the model applied by the Code of Practice. More reflective members of the professional special needs community of practice read this statement as meaning practice underpinned by the remedial teacher model. Drawing upon his experience of developments in England, as illuminated by the Innovatory Mainstream Practice project, Dyson also speculated that, unless the assumptions underpinning N. Irish practice were radically overhauled, then the principles underpinning the Code would only be adopted in a superficial and bureaucratic manner. This, as well as his nightmare scenario prediction, which will be discussed below, appears to have been quite prophetic.

Lest it should be read otherwise, we should say at this point that we are not so much overwhelmed, as underwhelmed, by the cross-cultural differences exposed by the current research. Despite the very facilitative human rights policy contexts in both jurisdictions, the resolutions in both jurisdictions appear to us to fall very far short of the realisation in practice of values we find worth pursuing - such as equity, participation and hence inclusion. Whilst there has been movement, more so in Northern Ireland, towards a more embedded school view of special needs education, and a more embedded view of the designated person’s role, these
moves have progressed slowly. They are generally not in the creative and radical directions described by Clarke, Dyson et al (1997) that would allow the co-ordinator role to either disappear altogether, or be transformed in ways that would better reflect a ‘richer’ or ‘thicker’ commitment to the values of equity, diversity and participation across the whole school.

6.1.2 Meeting Special Educational Needs in the ordinary school: making sense of the comparative analysis and working towards a more transformative inclusive practice

Limitations of the sample did not allow for comparisons between school sectors. So how should we best make some sense of this comparative analysis in a way that might facilitate change? Here, once again, we are drawn towards Dyson’s analysis as illuminated by the Innovatory Mainstream Practice project. As already said, Clarke, Dyson et al appreciated the fluid, non-linear and messy nature of special needs provision and recognised the need to understand the mutually interactive nature of factors such as: the prevailing meaning structures and values that were prevalent in society as a whole, including the various sub-groups within society; the particular social economic and political contexts; the educational technologies or range of pedagogies, curricula, and school systems that were able to be brought to the table. Dyson’s team represented the situation diagrammatically in the following way (see, Clarke, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore, 1997).

**Figure 3 A Model of Change in Special Needs Education (Clarke, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore, 1997)**
6.1.3 Social, political and educational contexts

Like complex societies elsewhere, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have not remained immune from enmeshment in a variety of discordant and contradictory policy discourses that serve to limit teachers’ practice. Within the Republic of Ireland for example, despite the 1998 Act marking a transition in policymaking from the reactive to the proactive, the EPSEN Act 2004 defined special needs as ‘a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate and to benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition’ (S.1). As Simmons et al (2006) remarked, whilst this was somewhat vague and might be seen as potentially inclusive, this definition, by using terms like “restricted capacity” and “enduring condition,” seemed to wed Republic of Ireland special needs education to a deficit concept of special needs - that is, one that appears to locate all problems, and by implication their causes and resolutions, in the individual child (Simmons et al, 2006). It seems to us too that the apparent unwillingness of Republic of Ireland Learning Support teachers to rush to become catalysts for pedagogical change amongst their subject specialist colleagues was not unconnected to the insufficient emphasis given within EPSEN for the need to provide a post of responsibility associated with the coordination of special needs work in schools. Not that this, on its own, is likely to be a solution to the task of developing a more thickly embedded notion of special needs education within the ordinary school - as the results of this research, in tandem with our own professional experience, attests.

Our sense of the situation in Northern Ireland is that the Education and Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (reiterating many of the changes made by ERA in England) advanced the emergence of a new moral order in N. Irish schooling (see also Gewirtz, 2002). The moral order associated with the marketisation of education was antithetical to the types of social justice and democratic school outcomes embedded within the fledging whole school discourse on special educational needs, and seriously increased the tension between special and mainstream. As predicted by Dyson, N. Irish schools lacked the capacity to powerfully engage with this shift in values, to find creative resolutions to the regulatory provisions associated with the Code of Practice that followed the NI Order: for example, to find creative solutions to the management of a bureaucratic system of individual identification, assessment and provision that defined special needs provision and diverted time away from developing the quality of teaching-learning for all. During this period, despite the potential embedded within the principles of the Code of Practice, the mainstream curriculum remained stonily indifferent to the contortions made by schools to have regard for the Code.

It should be noted at this stage, lest we be read as implying otherwise, that we do not blame the special needs community of practice for the state of diversity education. Dyson’s findings only serve to illustrate the many influences on...
school and classroom life, in particular the discourses and stories within the wider context, whose plots run counter to the task of developing more equitable diversity education. One contemporary illustration might make the point somewhat clearer. For many professional educators, a contemporary priority for schooling is to help create a more democratic and inclusive society where respect for diversity is a core element. Yet in Northern Ireland the policy environment is in a real muddle in this respect, a muddle in no small part related to the inability of elected politicians (or the desire on the part of some) to agree on how to reorganise education without the need for IQ tests - whose use judges so many children as failures and whose function, in the past, was to subdivide future generations into potential managers, technicians and labourers (the majority). Likewise, it has been long been recognised in the Republic of Ireland that “the institutionalisation of invidious status hierarchies between different post-primary schools serves to reproduce existing status hierarchies” (Clancy, 1995:490) and that middle class parents use their wealth in the private education sector to secure the class futures of their children (Lynch and Moran 2006).

6.1.4 Prevailing social and educational values

Dyson and his colleagues suggested that a school’s response to educational special needs issues required to be understood at three levels. The surface level comprises a set of activities and forms of provision which constituted what a school did about special needs, and underpinning this was a set of underlying aims which gave coherence to what the school did and constituted its rationale. The latter was itself underpinned by a set of assumptions concerning special needs education (see, Clarke, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore, 1997). Corbett (1999) referred to the latter as the deep culture of schooling: that is, the hidden curriculum of fundamental value systems and socially constructed ideas that had come to be given the status of taken-for-granted knowledge which, in turn, construct norms around which educational professionals approached issues to do with commonality and difference.

Recent research in Northern Ireland has explored the deep cultures within schooling and identified some very powerful discourses that only serve to maintain the status quo and limit the space for creative and pluralistic struggle (see, for example, Smith and Barr, 2008; Barr and Smith 2009). We have no doubt that these discourses also influence Republic of Ireland special needs education in a very similar and powerful way. Within the special needs community, the dominant perspective that guides the organization of responses to young people who experience learning difficulties (considered in their widest sense to include social and emotional issues) involves constructing or defining problems by reference to deficits within the individual (or within the individual’s home background) and defining individual change as the solution. Within the educational special needs world, this point of view is known as the ‘medical model’ (Stanovich and Jordan, 1998; Thomas and Loxley, 2001; Barton, 1998).

It is useful to reflect on the phenomenon whereby teachers, in their attempts
to meet diversity, over-emphasize individual experience. What are the origins of this worldview, and what are some of its consequences? With respect to genesis, Yates (2002) argued that school knowledge was still dominated by a modernist cultural meta-narrative involving ‘Enlightenment’ values and beliefs in a rational subject capable of exercising individual agency. In addition, Yates suggested that this prevailing cultural discourse, and its discursive practices of teaching and learning, were underpinned by both scientific and humanist variants of psychology.

Through the lens of these psychologies, individuals were separated from their social contexts and the social world was viewed as a fragmented and individualistic place. By failing to account for the way in which human behaviour was socially embedded and socially meaningful, they represented a very partial and underdeveloped notion of the known person or learner, and failed to appreciate the mutual involvement of children and their social worlds. With reference to the consequences of this discourse, conceptualizing the individual in deficit terms does not appear to us to be a helpful worldview for advancing a creative resolution to the diversity paradox based on inclusionary values (see also, Smith, 2005). Furthermore, since it discourages practitioners from considering barriers to participation in the social context, it represents an impediment to developing the quality of teaching and learning for all.

The views of educational special needs practitioners on pluralism in practice is also of relevance here (see Smith and Barr, 2008; Barr and Smith 2009). Armstrong (2003), for example, identified three discursive influences that had impacted the consciousness and practice of special education practitioners, i.e. ‘exclusion,’ ‘integration or normalization’ and, more recently, ‘inclusion’. The integration phase, which emerged in the wake of the Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science 1978), was characterized by an assimilationist perspective where the onus was put on the individual with special educational needs to fit in. By contrast, inclusive education was informed by the experiences of disabled people and their struggles for human rights (Armstrong, 2005). Nevertheless, despite the rhetoric within the policy environment, recent research, and our own experience as practitioners, resonates with Slee (2001), who observed that the language of inclusive education still represented a default vocabulary for assimilation.

Gergen (1994) suggested that discourses and stories (forms of discourses) served as communal resources that people used in ongoing relationships. They formed and informed sources of knowledge and views of reality. Not only this, since they influenced imagined alternatives and created possibilities, they needed to be considered as ‘resources of transformation’ (p. 189). More recently, drawing upon her long involvement with the special needs world, Corbett (1999) entered similar territory. Corbett concluded that, for progress towards educational inclusion, rather than policy or curricular developments alone, it was essential to address the ‘deep cultures’ (1999:129) within schools.
A number of implications for professional development arise as a result of this analysis. We would argue strongly that, when trying to re-form teacher professionalism for new times, teacher education needs to be a transformative experience where some of these deeply embedded and taken-for-granted assumptions can be subjected to critical scrutiny. This may help to open up the possibility of practitioners taking a role in trying to overcome some of these unhelpful stories rather than falling prey to them. Professional development then needs to offer teachers potential sites to express experience, to engage in critical reflection about the dominant social discourses constituting organizational life (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and encourage generative discourse; that is, ways of talking or otherwise representing that simultaneously challenges existing traditions and offers new creative possibilities for action (Gergen, 1999).

Consistent with the preference of teachers in the Northern Ireland sample, our analysis highlights the need for the continuing professional development of special needs practitioners to be school-based. As demonstrated by Clarke, Dyson et al., going beyond the whole-school approach required institutional development. Experience suggests that a key to change lies in the establishment of discursive arenas, or participative, dialogic processes within and between institutions. As Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987, p. 6-7) suggested: “The most powerful vehicle communities have for transforming their conventions (agreements, norms, values etc.) is through the act of dialogue made possible by language, alterations in linguistic practices have profound implications for change in social practice”.

On the other hand, an important implication of recent diversity research in Northern Ireland is that progress towards more creative special needs practice is facilitated by a view of human learning and human social behaviour as socially embedded and socially meaningful - something of a paradigm shift in Northern Irish education. Todd (2006) argued that theory was particularly important in complex areas where resolutions seemed illusive and hard thinking was needed in order to move forward. What was needed were tools - practical theory tools - for understanding and changing practice (Todd, 2006). Consequently, despite the strong lack of enthusiasm across both samples for theory-tools from the social sciences in order to help improve practice, we believe that this is a precipitous time indeed for educators to study commentaries from the disciplines having significance for education - such as psychology - and to engage with processes of critical reflection on the contribution that they make to education. Psychological research relevant to education has never been more productive than during the past two decades. Furthermore, the conceptions of human nature provided by the past history of ideas, methods and practices in psychology may not be up to the task of preparing professionals for new times - including the task of building just and equitable societies.

6.1.5 Available educational technologies
In Dyson’s research, a feature of the creative schools was in the way they perceived effective teaching - learning.
Dyson in effect found a shift in the centre of gravity away from the dominant perspective of “learning equals being taught” to “learning equals individual sense-making”. This was reflected in much richer technologies of curriculum adaptation and differentiation from the traditional watered-down curriculum and diet of worksheets characteristic of earlier views on special needs education. Smith and Barr (2008) revisited this theme when describing a framework for participatory inclusive practice in N. Irish schools. Following their earlier exploration of the meaning of educational inclusion in N. Irish society, they felt the need to go much further than their earlier deconstruction of current professional practice towards describing, with some rigour, an enabling, creative, inclusive practice. Their analysis was research informed and concerned with how to realize in practice concepts which are confusing and open to multiple interpretation such as equity, diversity and excellence for all.

Like Dyson, they argued for supplementing the dominant perspective on teaching-learning with “learning equals individual sense-making,” but also moving beyond this to “learning equals creating knowledge as part of doing things with others” (see Figure 4 below). Furthermore, on the basis of their framework, and underpinned by the assumption that self-evaluation was a key requirement for school improvement (MacBeath et al., 1996), they felt it both desirable and feasible, despite the reluctance shown by the teachers in the present study towards the idea of research, to develop a range of research-based and practical self-evaluation tools to help practitioners, in tandem with others, towards a critically reflective and collaborative exploration of current organizational arrangements with a view to identifying areas for improvement. It was envisaged that these tools could be used in a variety of ways to support school improvement and professional enquiry.
**Figure 4: Alternative models of Teaching-Learning (from Smith and Barr, 2008: 408)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Role of the teacher and goals of teaching</th>
<th>View of the curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning = Being taught</td>
<td>Expert&lt;br&gt;To impart new knowledge, concepts and skills&lt;br&gt;Curriculum as fact</td>
<td>Cognitive dimension stressed&lt;br&gt;Learners learn by being told&lt;br&gt;Learning is individual and affected by ability which is seen as fixed&lt;br&gt;Learning involves increased understanding of new ideas, memorizing new facts, practising new skills and making decisions based on new information&lt;br&gt;Learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning = Individual sense-making or Developing a community of learners</td>
<td>Expert&lt;br&gt;Role of anyone helping (teaching) is examined in terms of how it helps the learner make their own sense&lt;br&gt;To facilitate discovery of new knowledge, concepts, skills&lt;br&gt;To help make connections, discover meaning, gain new insights&lt;br&gt;Curriculum as activity</td>
<td>Cognitive dimension stressed&lt;br&gt;Students are engaged in active participation, exploration and research&lt;br&gt;Activities to develop understanding and create personal meaning through reflection&lt;br&gt;Focus still on the individual rather than the social processes in which the individual is engaged&lt;br&gt;Learning involves making connections between new and old experiences, integrating new knowledge and extending established schema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning = Building knowledge through doing things with others or Co-construction</td>
<td>More equal power dynamics&lt;br&gt;Teacher is viewed and views himself or herself as a learner&lt;br&gt;Someone promoting learning in this view will be helping learners engage in ‘generative’ rather than ‘passive’ learning activities and will act on the assumption that learners need to engage in collaborative argumentation and knowledge-testing;&lt;br&gt;To practice self-reflection and facilitate a reflective process in others about learning through a collaborative dialogue&lt;br&gt;Curriculum as inquiry</td>
<td>Recognizes that knowledge is constructed socially rather than individually&lt;br&gt;Crucial role of language and conversation in the creation and negotiation of shared meaning is emphasized&lt;br&gt;Students operate together to improve knowledge and help each other learn through dialogue&lt;br&gt;Co-construction stance moves us from viewing learning as an acquisition, whatever the commodity to be acquired, to viewing it as also becoming part of a community&lt;br&gt;View of learning is extended to include reflection on the learning process itself and meta-learning (learning about learning)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1.6 Some methodological and reflexive comments

A number of methodological limitations to the research require to be briefly reported here. The first of these is the need to take account of a number of differences between the two samples on a range of features: for example, between the teachers in terms of their ages, their professional life phases, and their experience in the world of special needs education; furthermore, the socio-economic characteristics of the schools in both samples. As suggested, the Republic of Ireland sample appeared to contain a greater number of schools having disadvantaged status.

The N. Irish results too, based as they were on a small sample located mostly within two Education and Library Boards, raises obvious concerns around the concept of external validity and the dangers of generalising from this study to the population of schools in Northern Ireland. We need to say too that, despite the pilot testing of the final questionnaire, some questionnaire respondents still complained about its length. Consequently, it cannot be ruled out that some respondents' answers - and thus internal validity - was affected. On the other hand, based on other relevant recent research (e.g. Smith and Barr, 2008; Barr and Smith 2009, O’Gorman and Drudy 2009), and evidence collected from the authors’ professional experience, we feel fairly confident about claiming that the results were representative of the present views of SENCOs in secondary schools across the province.

However, as important as it is to enable readers to make some judgements about the quality of scholarship, there is also a need for some researcher reflexivity - understood in terms of the need for researchers to include themselves in the picture and subject themselves to critical scrutiny (see, for example, Usher, 1996). Take, for example, our initial attempts, in the pursuit of methodological rigour, to try to standardise the research instruments. On reflection, this might now be read as unwitting and unreflective action that only served to underpin the research with a particular and naïve model of special needs education. That is, one that views the special needs task as more of a technical than social activity; a very complex social activity making little real sense outside of its own socio-political history and context. For us, as authors, the cross-cultural dimension to this piece of research served to remind us of the complexities of the special needs developments, and also served as a reality check against the dangers, prevalent in the professional educational special needs community, of becoming insular, narrowly preoccupied with school level as opposed to wider issues, and advocating oversimplified solutions.

On reflection too, our initial attempts to devise common research instruments containing a common language was beset by difficulties that were never completely resolved to the satisfaction of all. This on its own should have alerted us more quickly to the issue of context and the need to explore the nuances of meaning we each subscribed to in terms of our primary area of interest. Interestingly, at the stage of writing our draft report, subtle differences in the use of language were still noted that could be ascribed to whether our professional experiences
related mostly to work in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland.

It is axiomatic to suggest that education in Northern Ireland is experiencing a period of immense change. This year, for example, sees preparation continue for the review of public administration in Northern Ireland involving all governmental departments, the development of the Education and Skills Authority, the review of post-primary education, and the continued rollout of a more flexible (so-called child-friendly) Northern Ireland curriculum. Also, initiatives such as Extended schools and the Entitlement Framework aim to encourage new partnerships and collaborations, not only between schools, but between schools and the communities they serve.

More specifically, with regards to special needs education, at the very time that the researchers in this study were constructing questionnaires and interview schedules concerned with the current roles and responsibilities of designated special need educators, a Department of Education Fundamental Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion was nearing the completion of its deliberations. The review itself was in no small measure associated with the types of systemic pressures and forces that Dyson et al colourfully (and more accurately than some might wish to admit) referred to as “the nightmare scenario” (see, Clarke, Dyson, Millward, and Skidmore (1997, p123).

Although not yet available for general consultation, the Fundamental Review is widely expected to, for example: broaden the whole concept of educational need to take account of the fact that all children, at some point in their education and for a variety of reasons, may require some form of additional support for learning; devolve more responsibility, in tandem with increased accountability, to schools; encourage schools to work in clusters of learning communities in order to problem-solve issues of assessment and intervention and co-locate multi-agency professionals and access to Northern Ireland support teams to such learning communities or panels.

In the Republic of Ireland, the recent downturn in economic circumstances will undoubtedly impact upon provision for students identified with special educational needs. Already, the implementation of aspects of the EPSEN Act 2004 have been postponed and the exact implications of the budget changes remain unclear, but financial constraints abound.

Everything we have said then in this subsection about the complexity and nature of change in special needs developments makes us cautious either of predicting how practice or provision will change in the coming years. Because of the complexity outlined in this section, we find it encouraging for special needs education that fundamental questions about, for example, what people believe education is about have been on the wider social and political agenda. We believe the special needs community of practice has to clarify questions like this before reconstructing SENCO role and responsibilities (see also, Clarke, Dyson, Millward, and Skidmore (1997).
However, a much less optimistic reading of the future presents itself to us involving, for example, a significant lack of systemic capacity for change in ways that foreground principles of equity, participation and inclusion; or the continued scramble to buttress a beleaguered whole school approach with opportunistic chosen elements of segregated education in order to placate particularly vociferous lobbies. The emerging context nevertheless provides some wonderful opportunities for University Schools of Education to help shore up capacity by working with teachers both pre and post-service, and, with respect to the latter, working in much more creative relationships with local schools and communities in order to advance policy and practice in truly inclusive education.

6.2 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research set out to identify common areas for potential cross-border collaboration to promote inclusive education in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The focus adopted was the professional development requirements of ‘inclusion specialists’ - teachers specifically appointed to the area of special educational needs in mainstream schools. It was anticipated that the professional development required would be associated with the roles undertaken by the teachers and therefore both these elements were highlighted in the research process.

Across both jurisdictions it would appear that the role has evolved very much in reaction to the needs of the individual schools and in relation to the relative importance accorded to special needs support within the schools. The perceived lack of direction from the respective Departments of Education is common to both jurisdictions, despite the existence of official policy documents. While retaining a sense of differing school cultures and the constantly changing needs of students which requires the role to remain flexible to best meet the needs of unique populations, it would seem that there is a need for coherence among schools within each jurisdiction so that there is a more common approach to the delivery of support services in line with each Education Department policy.

In examining the skills and knowledge that participants feel are needed to carry out the role successfully, both pedagogy and curriculum areas are conspicuous by their relative lack of emphasis. The main skills mentioned were related to organization and time management. One might question whether these are generic skills that belong to general teacher education and general professional development programmes rather than being viewed as specific skills particularly pertinent to inclusion specialists. Other skills participants considered essential for the role were akin to a range of personal attributes. Again, the question arises as to whether ‘patience’, ‘sensitivity to student’s needs’ and ‘positive regard for students’ should be the prerogative of the SEN teacher or part of a set of generic skills for all teachers.

The barriers to carrying out the role successfully were very much the same for both jurisdictions. Lack of time and an overload of paperwork appear to be the main stumbling blocks. Many respondents do not have sufficient time allocated to the role, some are trying to fulfil the role
alongside having the responsibility of a full teaching timetable. There would seem to be a case for some clearer guidelines regarding the full time versus part time nature of the role. There may be some value in developing a model that assigns the role according to the number of pupils in the school. There would, however, need to be some flexibility for schools designated as ‘high needs’ or disadvantaged where the number of pupils requiring support may be high.

In the main, the role in both jurisdictions appeared to be somewhat peripheral to the main activity of the school, with a particularly heavy reliance in the Republic of Ireland on withdrawal. Some indications were in evidence of moving the role towards a more central, senior management role where the expertise of the inclusion specialist was made available for whole school staff development. This is a welcome development where the goal of inclusion and means of addressing the needs of all students was perceived as a concern of the whole school staff. The opportunity for inclusion specialists/SEN teachers to promote critical, reflective dialogue among the whole school staff should be considered as a key future development of the role and corresponding professional development offered to hone teachers’ team building and leadership skills in this field.

In relation to specific professional development sought in both jurisdictions, there was a strong emphasis on information pertaining to various classifications of disability and a corresponding lack of emphasis on pedagogy and curricular adaptations.

As noted previously, the role seems to be interpreted as one which acts as a buttress to the current status quo rather than challenges it. Professional development sought by teachers is generally based on the teacher’s current role.

However, professional development also has a function in informing the nature of the role. If professional development precisely mirrors the role undertaken by the teacher, it results in stagnation and little forward movement towards a more inclusive education system. This symbiotic relationship between these two elements is not always fully exploited in professional development programmes in ensuring exposure to topics outside those areas perceived as being immediately useful by the inclusion specialist/SEN teacher. New directions must be sought for professional development which promotes critical reflection and dynamic, creative approaches to including all students in mainstream schools.

In summary, from this research it would appear that with regard to the role of the specialist teacher working in the area of inclusion/special educational needs in mainstream schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, there is more variation within rather than between the two jurisdictions. In consequence of this commonality, potential areas can be identified for future collaboration in designing professional development programmes to promote inclusive education. Courses focusing on exploring the philosophical and sociological foundations of inclusion and developing creative ways of moving the inclusive education agenda forward should be
core components of such programmes, combined with the research skills to explore and evaluate the effectiveness of approaches undertaken. Other areas contributing to such professional development programmes could include holistic curricula, inclusive pedagogy, knowledge of disabilities, instructional skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, presentation skills and administrative skills. The overarching philosophy of such a programme should be for professional development to interrogate and inform the role rather than have the current role dictate the nature of professional development.

The evidence from this research suggests that respondents perceived their role as LS/R/SENCo teacher as being primarily a ‘remedial’ one in the Republic of Ireland and a ‘SENCo’ one in Northern Ireland. This role perception seemed to shape the professional development they felt they needed. However, the international literature would suggest that best practice in inclusive education requires a shift from these models towards what Clarke, Dyson et al. (1997) have described as the ‘External Coordinator’ and the ‘Transforming Coordinator’ models, indeed eventually moving to the ideal of the ‘Disappearing Coordinator’ model. Best practice in professional development should seek to move teachers and schools towards these transformative roles.

In the context of a changing world, there is a need to promote a vision of an equitable and just society which values all its citizens and where the most vulnerable children are accorded every opportunity to participate fully and equally with their peers.
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APPENDIX 1
Sample Interview Schedule

Research on Professional Development for Teachers Working in the Area of SEN in Mainstream Schools

NI / Republic of Ireland ______________ Coordinator/LS/R Teacher /SENCO ______________

Name: ___________________________________________ Tel. ______________

M/F *School Type___________ #Catchment area __________ Date__________

A) Introductory phone call
My name is ___________________________. I am ringing in response to your generous offer to contribute to the research on the Professional Development Requirements of (teachers) working with students with Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools.
The research team is very grateful for your interest in this research and for indicating that you would consider being interviewed. We have decided to conduct the interviews over the phone and wonder if you are still interested.

(A) No problem, I understand and thank you for taking the call. Goodbye.

(B) That’s great, we can arrange anytime that suits you for the phone interview. Would you like some of the detail now or would you prefer to talk later?

If introductory phone call is successful in eliciting consideration of an interview, proceed to section B, pre-interview information

B) Pre-Interview Information for Participants

1. The telephone interview that will last for 30-40 minutes approximately.

2. Questions relate to 3 areas
   • the roles and responsibilities of teachers working in the field of special education and
   • their Professional Development requirements
   • perceptions of their role

3. The interview will be tape recorded for accuracy
   • no names of people or schools will be used
• all contact or other information will be kept confidential
• after this research is completed, the tape recordings and the notes will be retained for analysis and research only
• all data will be stored securely and confidentiality maintained

4. There is no monetary benefit to you from participating in the interview;

5. The research will benefit the teaching profession.

6. You are free to refuse to answer any questions at any time without giving a reason.

7. You can also stop the interview at any time without any adverse consequences.

If you are happy to participate in this telephone interview process when can we arrange a time that is convenient for you?

Day _______________________    Date ___________________    Time ________________

Number to phone _______________________

Telephone Interview
*Please use the prompts for each question if the information given does not elicit the areas mentioned in the prompts.
*For each jurisdiction use the appropriate terminology – (Republic of Ireland terms in brackets)

Interviewee Name ____________________________________________

Date _________________ Day __________________________ Time __________

NI / (Republic of Ireland)      SENCO (LS/R Teacher /Coordinator)

Tel phone No ________________

M/F     *School Type______________  #Catchment area ________________

Other pertinent information

Interview Preamble
Thank you for agreeing to the interview. We really appreciate your participation in this research. Your input will be valuable. First, I must comply with the university ethics
committee regulations and record your consent to be interviewed. If you are happy to take part in the research can I ask you to respond ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the following questions.

Are you aware of the nature of the research? ____________________________________

Have you had sufficient time to consider whether to take part in this study? ____________________________________

Do you understand that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw from the research at any time? ____________________________________

Do you agree that, as part of this research project, audiotapes of your participation in the research will be made? ____________________________________

Do you understand that your name will not be identified in any use of these records? ____________________________________

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.

*School type: NI (1) Controlled Secondary (2) Maintained Secondary (3) Grant Maintained Integrated/Secondary (4) Controlled Integrated Secondary (5) Voluntary Grammar (6) Controlled Grammar Republic of Ireland (7) Secondary; (8) VEC; (9) Comm & Comp; (10) other catchment area (1) City; (2) Town; (3) areas with population under 1,500
Interview Schedule
There are 3 sections and a total of 20 questions. The 1st section is about Professional Development in Special Education, the 2nd section is about roles and responsibilities of SENCOs (LS/R teachers) and the last section is about differences in perception of the role.

Preliminary questions

(NI) Would you classify yourself as a SENCO? With whom do you work primarily - teachers or students?
(REPUBLIC OF IRELAND) Would you classify yourself as a Learning Support Teacher or a Resource teacher? Are you the main co-ordinator for pupils with Special Educational Needs? With whom do you work primarily - teachers or students?

Section one
1. What Professional Development courses, if any, have you taken to do with the support of children with Special Educational Needs?
   a. Can you give me some details about these Professional Development courses? (Prompt: When? Who organised them, Where held, How long in duration, Type of award if any, Accredited by whom?)
2. Do you have any current Professional Development needs in relation to special education? (Prompt: Any particular areas or skills you would like to develop.)
3. Why are these areas of Professional Development important?
4. Speaking generally, in relation to teacher Professional Development, what is your preferred type of course? (Prompt: Part-time/full-time; in school/out of school; on-line/face to face; during the school year/summer; daylong/yearlong etc.)
5. In relation to Special Education, are there courses currently on offer that would meet the Professional Development needs you mentioned previously - consider both certificated /award bearing and non-certificated /non-award bearing courses?
   a. Firstly, certificated courses /Award bearing
      i. Diploma or Certificate
      ii. Masters
      iii. Other - including short courses - elicit DETAILS
   b. Are there any non-certificated (non-award bearing) courses you would find useful? Please give details
6. Speaking generally, what are the difficulties you might face if you wanted to participate in Professional Development? 
   Prompts
   a. No courses that meet your needs
   b. Financial
c. Time
d. Distance - courses not readily available in your area
e. Lack of information on what's available
f. Lack of computer skills / access to internet
g. School Management
h. No interest (not now /never)
i. Non-School /Personal circumstances
j. Etc.

Section two
7. In relation to your work as a SENCO (LS/R teacher), what do you see as your main roles and responsibilities?
   Prompt to ensure working with other staff - (SNAs and teaching colleagues etc.) and using ICT are included)

8. In your opinion, what are the skills, knowledge and attributes that are needed to carry out these roles and responsibilities of a SENCO (LS/RT) teacher?

9. In relation to carrying out your roles and responsibilities as a SENCO (LS/R teacher) how do you find each of the following facilitate you?
   a. School Management - principal, deputy principal
   b. Other Colleagues
   c. Parents
   d. Students
   e. Support Services (Republic of Ireland - SESS; SENOs; NEPS)
   f. DENI/ELB (DES/VEC)
   g. Other

10. Do you find any of them prove to be barriers to you in carrying out your roles and responsibilities as a SENCO (LS/R teacher)? If so, in what ways?
    a. School Management - principal, deputy principal
    b. Other Colleagues
    c. Parents
    d. Students
    e. Support Services (Republic of Ireland - SESS; SENOs; NEPS)
    f. DENI/ELB; (DES /VEC)
    g. Other

11. Are there any aspects of your current roles and responsibilities you would like to change?
    If no, go to section 3. If yes, continue with next question - Q.12

12. What are these aspects you would change and what differences would they make to the work you currently do?
13. Can you identify what prevents you implementing these changes and attaining this different vision of your work as a SENCO (LS/R teacher)?

Prompt
a. Human
   • Personal Knowledge,
   • Staff e.g. numbers, knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes
   • Lack of SNAs
b. Material - curriculum restrictions, books & texts, programmes, ICT
c. Resource -financial
d. Other stakeholders preventing your ideal of the role being realised

This is the last section. It deals with identifying any similarities or differences between how the Department of Education and others view the role & responsibilities of the SENCO (LS/R teacher) and the vision that you hold as a SENCO (LS/R teacher) of your role and responsibilities.

Section 3
14. How do you think your role as a SENCO (LS/R teacher) is perceived by others in the school
   a. by school management – principal, deputy principal etc
   b. by parents
   c. by colleagues
   d. by students
   e. by SNAs

15. How do you think the DENI (DES) envisions the role and responsibilities of the SENCO/ (LS/R teacher)?

Prompt What do they think the most important aspects of your job are?

16. In relation to this vision the DENI (DES) hold of the role of SENCOs (LS/R teachers), how is it transmitted to teachers?

** NB Prompt to find out teachers’ awareness of, use of and their opinion of the value of
NI Code of practice (Republic of Ireland ‘Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs –Post Primary Guidelines’)

17. Does your own vision of your role differ from the way you feel the DENI (DES) envision your role?

18. In your opinion is there much variation among schools in the roles & responsibilities of the SENCO (LS/R teacher)? Prompt: If so, what are the differences?
19. What, do you think, are the greatest influences on the scope of the role of the SENCO (LS/R teacher)?
   Prompt: DENI/ELB (DES/VEC) or school or individual teacher or other most important determinant of role

20. When you think of your self as a SENCO (LS/R teacher), whose main job focus is in the area of Special Education, is your identity as a teacher any different to that of other post primary teachers? Prompt: If yes, in what ways are they different?

That was the final question!

Have you any further comments you would like to add concerning the Professional Development needs, roles and responsibilities or professional identity of the SENCO (LS/R teacher)?

Thank you for your participation and interest. It is greatly appreciated and highly valued. Thanks again.
APPENDIX 2
Sample Survey and Accompanying Letter

SENCO SURVEY

Dear SENCO

The purpose of this research is to investigate the roles and development needs of mainstream Post -Primary teachers who are working with students identified as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Dr Eileen Winter
Dr Ron Smith

Queen's University Belfast
School of Education

YOUR HELP AND SUPPORT IS VERY MUCH APPRECIATED
A. ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR SCHOOL

Please tick, or fill in, boxes as appropriate.

1. In which Education and Library Board do you work?
   - BELB
   - NEELB
   - SEELB
   - SELB
   - WELB

2. In which type of school do you work?
   - Controlled Secondary
   - Maintained Secondary
   - Grant Maintained Integrated/Secondary
   - Controlled Integrated Secondary
   - Voluntary Grammar
   - Controlled Grammar
   - Other (please specify)

3. Please enter the enrolment size of your school:

4. Please indicate your age category:
   - 20-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60-65

5. Please indicate your gender:
   - Female
   - Male

6. How many years Teaching Experience do you have?
   - 0-3
   - 4-7
   - 8-15
   - 16-30
   - 30+
7. How many years have you been a SENCO?

1-5  
6-10  
11-15  
16-20  
over 20

8. What has been your career path to date?

9. How many management allowance points do you receive as SENCO?  
(Note: Not applicable for Vice-Principals or Principals)

0  
1  
2  
3  
4  
5

10. Please indicate any other position(s) of responsibility you have:

Class Teacher
Year Head
Head of Key Stage
Head of Department/Subject Co-ordinator
Senior Management Team (SMT)
Principal
Vice Principal
Special Needs Teacher

11. Are you responsible for line managing the Classroom Assistants in your school?

Yes ☐  No ☐

12. Please indicate your main teaching subject area, if applicable:
13. How many hours per week are you allocated to perform your role as SENCO?

- 0-2 hours ☐
- 2-4 hours ☐
- 4-6 hours ☐
- 6-8 hours ☐
- 8-10 hours ☐
- 11-15 hours ☐
- 16-20 hours ☐
- 21-25 hours ☐

14. Do you feel that this allocation is sufficient?

Yes ☐ No ☐

15. If ‘No’ please indicate what you think the required hours should be:

- 0-2 hours ☐
- 2-4 hours ☐
- 4-6 hours ☐
- 6-8 hours ☐
- 8-10 hours ☐
- 11-15 hours ☐
- 16-20 hours ☐
- 21-25 hours ☐

16. Please tick any relevant qualifications you have within the area of Special Educational Needs (SEN):

- Dip PD ☐
- MEd ☐
- Other (please specify) ☐
- None ☐

17. Please state the percentage (%) of pupils at your school who are on the Special Educational Needs register:

18. Please enter the percentage (%) of pupils at your school who are registered at each stage of the Code of Practice:

- Stage 1
- Stage 2
- Stage 3
- Stage 4
Stage 5
19. Approximately, how many Education Plans were devised in your school this year?

20. Does your school have a discrete Special Needs Department?
   Yes ☐ □
   No ☐

21. Type of SEN provision within the school (please tick)
   - Mainstream class, full time with withdrawal for individual instruction ☐
   - Mainstream class, with withdrawal for group instruction ☐
   - Mainstream class, supported by in-class team teaching, with some withdrawal ☐
   - Mainstream class, supported by team teaching with no withdrawal ☐
   - Mainstream class, supported by Classroom Assistants ☐
   - Mainstream class with occasional advice from Learning Support ☐
   - Mainstream class part-time, and special class part-time ☐
   - Mainstream class with no additional support ☐
   - Mainstream class with support of visiting peripatetic/outreach teacher ☐
   - Special class full-time ☐
   - Team teaching ☐
   Other - please specify:

22. If students are withdrawn for support, from which subjects are they most frequently withdrawn? (please specify)

23. What SEN issues have been identified for the School Development Plan?
   Agreed priorities identified for short term:
   1
   2
   3
   4
   Agreed priorities identified for longer term:
   1
   2
   3
   4

24. Does your school have a Special Educational Needs Team?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐

25. Do you think there should be one?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
26. Does your school have a SEN policy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

27. Approximately, how many students in your school have been identified in each of the following categories (tick more than one if appropriate and write DN for Don’t know)?

- Learning difficulties
- Medical Conditions (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy)
- Physical Difficulties (e.g. Cerebral Palsy)
- Sensory Impairment; Hearing
- Sensory Impairment; Visual
- Social, Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties
- Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia)
- Speech & Language Difficulties
- Difficulties due to a failure to master the basic skills in reading and number
- Difficulties coming to terms with concepts and with processes across the curriculum
- Difficulties with reading skills beyond the first stages of decoding, i.e. middle and higher -order reading skills
- Identified New Disabilities such as Autism, Asperger’s, ADHD
- Difficulties due to absence, broken education, or having too many teachers during the session
- Other

28. Please enter the percentage of young people receiving Free School Meals:

29. How many of the following pupils do you have in your school:

- Ethnic Minority
- Looked After Children
- Being Bullied
- Fixed-term Suspension

30. Does your school have an SEN Governor?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

31. How frequently are you in contact with the SEN Governor?

- Weekly
- Termly
- Annually
- Never
B. ABOUT YOUR ROLE

1. What are the major roles and responsibilities of the SENCO in your school? How important do you rate the following. Use the scale 1 (unimportant) - 5 (extremely important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSIBILITIES</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ensuring that all pupils, including those with special or additional needs, receive their full educational entitlement and have access to the whole curriculum</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Managing staff – other teaching staff and non-teaching staff (Classroom Assistants)</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Managing Stage 2 and Stage 3 interventions and the development of alternative teaching strategies and individual programmes where necessary</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Writing/reviewing SEN policy</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Preparing and managing statutory assessment paperwork</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bidding for additional funding</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meeting with parents and carers</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assessment of individual pupils/groups</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Re-assessment of students’ progress as appropriate</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teaching - in some cases whole classes but in some cases small groups</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Managing the transition process from KS2/KS3; KS3/KS4; KS4/KS5; KS5 / Post School Provision</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Tracking pupil progress using all available data and evidence</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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### RESPONSIBILITIES

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<th>RESPONSIBILITIES</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning special arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing budget and resources including Special Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special arrangements for end of key stage tests and external examinations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading CPD for all staff, governors or parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing CPD for other SENCOs within clusters or ELB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Education Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting as a role model/mentor for Beginning Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting staff in the differentiation of curriculum to ensure full access for all pupils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convening Annual/Transition Reviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaising with feeder-follow-up schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of behaviour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration of screening/diagnostic tests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of maths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaising with the Educational Psychology Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaising with other external professionals (social workers, therapists)</td>
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</table>
### RESPONSIBILITIES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
<th>Column 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring subject teachers, advising on and supporting their teaching and curriculum delivery for those pupils with special educational needs</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting a positive school ethos and celebrating achievement for all</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting colleagues with behaviour issues through training, in class support and strategies for classroom management</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinforcing the Revised Curriculum Statutory Entitlement Statements to ensure that all colleagues recognise that every teacher is a teacher of pupils with special educational needs</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysing data to ensure that teaching and learning is effective across year groups and Key Stages for potentially disadvantaged groups or individuals</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing support and training (where necessary) for teacher to manage and work effectively with other adults</td>
<td>□</td>
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### OTHER DUTIES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
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<th>Column 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Protection</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travellers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compliance with DDA</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looked After Children</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifted and Talented</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Tutor</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
OTHER DUTIES

• English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Please add any additional responsibilities here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most important</th>
<th>Most time</th>
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</table>

2a. In the box below, using the headings from Question 1 above, please list the five activities which, in your role as a SENCO, you regard as most important and the five on which you spend most time.

2b. As a SENCO, do you see any mismatch between what you think needs to be done and what you actually do? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please add any comments here.
3. How satisfied are you with the following areas of your work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Fairly Satisfied</th>
<th>Fairly Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The opportunities I have to engage with pupils so that they are excited about their learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. My ability to improve the attainment of my pupils</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. My confidence in myself that I can make a real difference to all/most pupils' learning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The amount of time I give to:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Strategic developments of SEN/school policy development</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Whole class/small group teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Withdrawal of students for individual/small group teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Diagnostic assessment/feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Behaviour management</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Pastoral issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Other administration tasks (e.g. reporting to meetings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Responding to new initiatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Working/supporting colleagues on teaching/learning issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>j. Liaising with parents on their children's needs</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
k. Liaising with external professionals

l. Team teaching

m. Analysing data to ensure that teaching and learning is effective across year groups and Key Stages for potentially disadvantaged groups or individuals

n. Preparing resources and subject materials for differentiated in-class teaching

Please add any comments here.

In the last 3 years (or since you stated teaching if it is less than 3 years), which one of the roles mentioned in this section have you:

Experienced the greatest increase in satisfaction?

Experienced the most dissatisfaction?

Comments:
C. YOUR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

1. How satisfied are you with:

   a) Your overall current CPD opportunities
      
   b) The overall focus of the formal professional development opportunities on offer to you

   c) The overall quality of your CPD

   d) The extent to which you get time to reflect on your teaching

   e) The time and opportunity to learn with and from colleagues

   f) The balance of professional development opportunities your school has supported to meet your needs and those of the school

   g) Have you undertaken further training/studies in the last 4 years (e.g. NPQH; MA; MEd; Diploma)?
      Yes [ ] No [ ]

   h) Are you currently planning further training/studies in the next 4 years (e.g. NPQH; MA; MEd; Diploma)?
      Yes [ ] No [ ]

   i) Why/why not:
2. Please indicate in Column 1, all of the contexts you have used for In-Service and/or Professional Development.

In column 2, please rank your top 3 preferred options for the delivery of Professional Development/In-Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tick if used</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rank preferred option</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contexts for Professional Development</strong></td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based (e.g. via colleagues)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based (more informal - learning from colleagues and reflecting on your teaching)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board based (e.g. via ELB provision)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Board Learning Group</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Training Unit (RTU)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELB Teams (e.g. Behaviour Support Team, Autism Support Team)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Advisory Service (CASS)</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/College (e.g. Award bearing courses)</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-Learning/Distance Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outside Organizations (e.g. NASEN)</td>
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</table>

3. What, in your opinion, are the best ways for improving teachers' knowledge skills and attitudes in the area of SEN?
4. From the following list please indicate which areas you feel you would require CPD:

Managing pupils with:

- Learning difficulties
- Medical Conditions (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy)
- Physical Difficulties (e.g., Cerebral Palsy)
- Sensory Impairment; Hearing
- Sensory Impairment; Visual
- Social, Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties
- Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia)
- Speech & Language Difficulties
- Difficulties due to a failure to master the basic skills in reading and number
- Difficulties coming to terms with concepts and with processes across the curriculum
- Difficulties with reading skills beyond the first stages of decoding, i.e. middle and higher-order reading skills
- Identified syndromes and New Disabilities such as Autism, Asperger’s, ADHD
- Difficulties due to absence, broken education, or having too many teachers during the session
- Finance
- Managing the Annual Review process
- Managing Classroom Assistants
- Policy development
- Pupil assessment
- Record keeping
- SEN administration
- Writing and reviewing Education Plans (EPs)
- Understanding familial, ethnic and cultural experience of students
- Understanding and communicating the patterns of students performance access across the curriculum
- Evaluating SEN provision
- Collaborating with senior staff in developing SEN policy and practice

Other (please specify)
5. My in-service/professional development needs as a SENCO

A. Rate the following components of a possible programme of professional development for SENCOS. In relations to your needs how important do you think each of the following is? Use a scale of 1-5 (1 most important – 5 least important)

B. Choose a maximum of 10 key areas to be included in a programme (Rank 1 = most important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Professional Development Needs as a SENCO</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How important are they? Rate 1-5</td>
<td></td>
<td>KEY areas 1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychological Development in Childhood</td>
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<td>2. Psychological Development in Adolescence</td>
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<td>3. Different Types of Learning Difficulties and their Characteristics</td>
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<td>4. Assessment of Learning Difficulties</td>
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<td>5. Interpreting Psychological Assessments</td>
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<td>6. Sociology of Special Educational Needs</td>
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<td>7. Philosophical Issues in Special Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The Law and Special Educational Needs</td>
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<td>9. School policy and planning in SEN</td>
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<td>10. Working with parents of children with SEN</td>
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<td>11. Developing skills in collaborating with other teachers</td>
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<td>12. Developing alternative curriculum for students with SEN</td>
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<td>13. Teaching strategies for students with SEN</td>
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<td>14. Teaching History, Geography, Science to students with SEN</td>
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<td>15. Teaching English as a second language</td>
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<td>16. Social Skills Training</td>
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<td>17. Health Education for students with SEN</td>
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<td>18. Language and Literacy for students with SEN</td>
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<td>19. Mathematics for students with SEN</td>
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<td>20. Developing materials for use with students with SEN</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Speech and Language Therapy</td>
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<td>22. Occupational Therapy</td>
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<td>23. Behaviour Management</td>
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<td>24. Information, Communication and Assistive Technology</td>
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<td>25. Developing teachers’ Computer Skills</td>
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</table>
### My Professional Development Needs as a SENCO

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<tr>
<td>26. Conducting Research in SEN</td>
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<td>27. Developing an Education Plan for a student with SEN</td>
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<td>28. Access to other teachers working in the area of SEN</td>
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<td>29. Access to Library facilities</td>
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<td>30. Access to current journals</td>
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<td>31. Establishing links between special schools &amp; mainstream schools</td>
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<td>32. Admin and Record keeping</td>
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<td>33. Inclusion on children with SEN into mainstream classes</td>
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<td>34. Student Peer-Collaborative Learning</td>
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<td>35. Teaching students from the travelling community</td>
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<td>36. Presentation Skills for giving in-service</td>
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<td>37. Other (Please state &amp; then rate)</td>
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If you are willing to be contacted about further, related research, please provide your details below.

**Name:**

**School:**

**School Address:**

**Email:**

Thank you very much for your support in completing this questionnaire. Please return to: ron.smith@qub.ac.uk

THANK YOU