TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR INCLUSION

Policy Mapping Grid: United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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Further information about the Teacher Professional Learning for Inclusion (TPL4I) activities is available on the TPL4I web area.

Secretariat	Brussels Office
Østre Stationsvej 33	Rue Montoyer, 21
DK-5000 Odense C Denmark	BE-1000 Brussels Belgium
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20	Tel: +32 2 213 62 80
secretariat@european-agency.org	brussels.office@european-agency.org

www.european-agency.org

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SECTION 1: WIDER POLICY CONTEXT

Wider policy context

In Northern Ireland, special educational provision serves to remove or diminish the barriers to achievement which children and young people with special needs may face. These may include the classroom approach to learning or the physical nature of the learning environment.

Provision for all learners with special educational needs (SEN) is met within what is referred to as the SEN Framework, which comprises the following:

- the Education (Northern Ireland – NI) Order 1996

- the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (NI) 2005

- the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Act 2016

- the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005

- the 1998 Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs and the 2005 Supplement to the Code.

The above Orders, the Act and the Regulations place statutory responsibility for securing provision for learners with SEN with the Education Authority (EA) and schools. They also detail the need for co-operation between Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) and the EA during the SEN statutory assessment process.

The legislative definition of SEN is 'a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made'.

A learner has a learning difficulty if:

- they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of learners of their age;

- they have a disability which either prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for learners of their age in mainstream schools;

- they have not attained the lower limit of compulsory school age and are, or would be, if special educational provision were not made for them, likely to fall into the two categories above when they are of compulsory school age.

The Orders, the Act and the Regulations detail rights for parents, including extended rights of appeal against EA decisions. The Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (SENDO) strengthened the rights of learners with SEN to be educated in mainstream schools, where their parents want this and the interests of other learners can be protected.

SENDO also introduced disability discrimination provisions that apply to schools and the EA.

Wider policy context
The remit of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal, now known as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal, was extended to hear claims of disability discrimination against schools and the EA. SENDO placed new duties on the EA, including the provision of advice and information on SEN matters for parents and schools and an informal means of avoiding and resolving disputes between parents and schools and/or the EA – the Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service. SENDO requires the EA and other school authorities to review and improve physical accessibility to school buildings. A review of the SEN Framework in Northern Ireland is nearly complete. The passing of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 was the first of the three building blocks to be put in place. The other elements are the new Regulations and a new Code of Practice. A draft of the new Regulations was consulted upon in 2016 and since then significant work has been progressed to update and improve the Regulations. Due to the number of changes made to the Regulations since 2016, a further consultation on the Regulations and also on the new Code of Practice is planned for early 2020. A staged implementation of the new Framework is planned from September 2020. (European Agency, Country information for United Kingdom (Northern Ireland), [Legislation and policy](#))

SECTION 2: VISION AND MAIN PRINCIPLES OF TPL4I POLICY

2.1 Policy vision

Policy priorities	Findings
2.1.1 Policy is guided by a vision that all teachers (i.e. student teachers, beginning teachers, experienced teachers, teacher educators) can access career-long professional learning opportunities regarding the principles of inclusive education	2.1.1.1 Initial teacher education (ITE) in Northern Ireland is 'based on the reflective and activist practitioner model'. It centres on the development of a framework of teaching competences, as outlined by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI, 2007). The competences make explicit the attributes, skills and knowledge that teachers require within the context of a model of continuing professional development (CPD). 'The competences are not discrete or "complete" at any stage of the teacher's professional life'. Rather, they must be viewed dynamically as 'initially supporting, but also evolving out of, the teacher's particular professional context at given stages in their career'. The GTCNI competence statements specifically refer to 'the need for teachers to meet the needs of all learners in their care, including those who may have particular or special needs'. The competences state that teachers need: - knowledge and understanding of 'their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice'; - to 'know the features of the most common special needs' and how best to address them; - to plan and employ appropriate teaching and assessment strategies to meet the variety of learner needs they encounter in their professional lives. (European Agency, Country

Policy priorities		Findings
		information for United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, Teacher education for inclusive education)
2.1.2	Policy is guided by a vision that all teachers receive education regarding their role and collaboration in and contribution to inclusive education	–
2.1.3	Policy is guided by a vision that all teachers receive education regarding their pedagogical responsibility to promote the interaction, learning, participation and collaboration of all learners	–

Evaluative comments for 'Policy vision'

Initial work by the Leadership Competences Advisory Group (a working group of key stakeholders established by the Department of Education and led by the GTCNI) has indicated that any new set of leadership competences should reflect the vision of Learning Leaders, i.e. that 'every teacher is a learning leader, accomplished in working collaboratively with all partners in the interests of children and young people' (Department of Education, 2016, p. 4). While these new leadership competences may eventually change or replace the current 27 GTCNI teacher competences, it is too early to say when this might occur. Moreover, such changes would only be possible following extensive consultation with the teaching profession in Northern Ireland.

2.2 Main principles

Policy priorities	Findings
2.2.1 Teachers' professional learning is defined in policy as a prerequisite for inclusive education	–
2.2.2 Policy states that the principles and practice of inclusive education should be part of initial teacher education	2.2.2.1 Programmes are designed to: *… enable students to develop the professional competences appropriate to the ITE phase as set out in the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland's 2011 publication Teaching: the Reflective Profession. The 27 competence statements, which may be considered as learning outcomes, are grouped under three broad headings:* • *professional values and practice* • *professional knowledge and understanding* • *professional skills and application.* *The competences cover a wide range of knowledge and skills, including those relating to cultural diversity (competence 8), special educational needs (competence 9), and teaching pupils with different levels of attainment (competence 15).* (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, <u>Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education</u>)

Policy priorities	Findings
2.2.3 Policy states that beginning teachers should receive appropriate education and support to enable them to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills for inclusive education	2.2.3.1 'To accompany the professional competences, the _Teacher Education Partnership Handbook_' (Northern Ireland Teacher Education Committee et al., 2010) brings together 'guidance for student teachers, beginning teachers, teacher-tutors'. Further guidance is provided in the handbook. (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education)
2.2.4 Policy ensures that experienced teachers receive appropriate education and support to enable them to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills for inclusive education	–
2.2.5 Policy states that specialist teachers and other professionals (e.g. speech and language therapists, multilingual education teachers and other professionals who work in schools) receive appropriate education and support to enable them to acquire the knowledge, attitudes and skills for inclusive education	2.2.5.1 Teachers of learners with visual or hearing impairments 'must be eligible to teach and hold an approved specialist qualification'. Department of Education Circular 2007/22 on Qualifications of Teachers in Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Special Schools 'sets out the requirements and gives a list of approved courses and providers'. _Mainstream schools must have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to oversee provision of teaching and learning for pupils in the school with special educational needs (SEN). These are usually experienced teachers who may acquire a specialist qualification as part of their continuing professional development._ (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education)

Policy priorities	Findings
	2.2.5.2 The Northern Ireland Assembly agreed on changes to SEN policy in 2012. Work has been on-going to develop a new SEN and Inclusion Framework. The Framework brings together the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Act (NI) 2016 (the 2016 Act), new draft SEN Regulations and a revised Code of Practice to enable more responsive SEN provision. The 2016 Act requires each mainstream school to have a designated Learning Support Co-ordinator (LSC) (currently known as a SENCO). Draft SEN Regulations propose that an LSC must have at least three years' full-time equivalent experience of teaching learners with SEN. The draft Regulations also provide for Boards of Governors of mainstream schools to ensure that the LSC receives the necessary on-going training and sufficient time to conduct their role effectively, with regular opportunities to provide information to the Board of Governors about special educational needs matters. Consultation on the draft Regulations and Code of Practice is planned for 2020.
2.2.6 Policy states that teacher educators working in university education departments or pedagogical institutes should be trained and committed to the inclusive education agenda in their courses, as understood in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Disability Strategy	–

Evaluative comments for 'Main principles'

As the evaluative comments for 'Policy vision' state, current Northern Ireland teacher competences are likely to be reviewed as part of the work being taken forward by the *Learning Leaders* strategy. It is, however, too early to say when this might start.

The draft Regulations and Code of Practice were previously consulted on in 2016. However, as some time has elapsed and significant changes have been made, a further joint consultation on the draft Regulations and Code of Practice is planned for 2020.

SECTION 3: GOALS AND CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT FOR TPL4I POLICY

3.1 Goals

Policy priorities	Findings
3.1.1 Policy states that all teachers should have qualifications that reflect an inclusive education agenda	3.1.1.1 Referring to ITE programmes: 'All teachers are trained to have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs (SEN), although specialist qualifications are available for particular roles'. (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, [Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education](#))
3.1.2 Policy states competence areas for inclusive education for all teachers working at different levels of education (e.g. professional development of all teachers to facilitate their involvement in co-teaching, planning together, developing differentiated materials collaboratively, etc.)	–

Policy priorities	Findings
3.1.3 Policy states that all teachers' professional learning opportunities consider teacher competences for inclusive education	–
3.1.4 There is a formal strategy for promoting dialogue between ministries, regional/local authorities/municipalities and teacher educators to agree on the requirements of teachers' professional development opportunities for inclusion	3.1.4.1 *Under the Review of SEN and Inclusion, two capacity-building pilots are currently operating:* • *one in early years settings to increase providers' capacity to identify, assess and make provision for children with SEN in their immediate pre-primary year;* • *one in school settings to increase the capacity of teachers and SEN Co-ordinators to appropriately use and interpret educational assessment resources, to better identify and meet the needs of learners with SEN.* The Department of Education 'is funding a further SEN literacy continuous professional development programme'. *The programme is run by Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College and is offered to all primary schools over a three-year period. This also falls within the parameters of the Review of SEN and Inclusion and offers specialist training to master's degree level, accredited by the British Dyslexia Association*. (European Agency, [Country information for United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, Teacher education for inclusive education](#)) 3.1.4.2 The evaluation of the early years pilot scheme indicated that good progress had been made across all areas and momentum should not be lost. The evidence from the evaluation showed that early identification, aligned with appropriate intervention and support, helps young children make better

Policy priorities	Findings
	progress and lays firm foundations for their future learning and life chances beyond their pre-primary years. The SEN Early Years Inclusion Service regional model provides for a longer-term strategy for early intervention, following the extensive pilot phase. This service: • enhances the children's readiness for formal education; • improves the skills of pre-primary practitioners to identify, assess and meet those children's needs; • improves consistency of SEN provision across these pre-primary services; • provides a pathway to a future model of SEN best practice for early intervention, assessment and provision across early years settings. 3.1.4.3 The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Literacy Project, run by Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College, offered CPD for teachers to develop their capacity to teach reading, spelling and independent writing skills to children of primary age with SEN. The project ended in March 2015. However, course materials were available to all teachers in Northern Ireland for a further three years via C2K (an information and communications network).
3.1.5 There is a mechanism to ensure that all professional learning opportunities available to teachers are aligned with national- and local-level policy goals for an understanding of inclusive education	–

Policy priorities	Findings
3.1.6 There are strategies to ensure that local-level professional opportunities for teachers are flexible/adaptable to local school contexts and school development plans for inclusive education	–
3.1.7 There is a medium- and long-term review strategy for teachers' professional learning opportunities to ensure they meet system requirements for an inclusive education system	–

Evaluative comments for 'Goals'

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3.2 Continuum of support

Policy priorities	Findings
3.2.1 There is a strategy to ensure a continuum of diverse professional learning opportunities for inclusive education – for pre-service, beginning and experienced teachers, as well as teacher educators and support teachers – across all levels where teachers work	3.2.1.1 In March 2016, the Department of Education launched *Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning*. The strategy's aims include providing: *… a structured framework for teacher professional learning. It indicates that students and beginning teachers should:* • *know that their course content and delivery will reflect the high standards expected of them as teachers* • *access a range of skills and experience from tutors and know that some of their course will be delivered by a tutor with recent classroom and/or research experience* • *be supported to reflect the strategies used in delivering their course in their own practice* • *observe and be observed by peers and more experienced teachers as part of their professional learning, and undertake joint lesson observations* • *access coaching and mentoring from peers and more experienced practitioners* • *have additional planned support for professional learning at the key transition points in their teaching career.* (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education)

Policy priorities	Findings
3.2.2 There are strategies for developing leadership competences (e.g. school leadership or learning support leadership roles) for inclusive education in all relevant professional learning opportunities	**3.2.2.1** _Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning_ was published in 2016. _This strategy aims to aid the development of a structured Teacher Professional Learning Framework, based on revised teaching and leadership competences and linked to improved outcomes for pupils. It also promotes collaboration and sharing of best practice through professional learning communities and strengthening leadership capacity in schools_. The strategy 'requires training providers to ensure ITE programmes enable students to meet the required professional competencies'. It includes a commitment to implementation over several years through annual action plans. (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, _Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education_) **3.2.2.2** One of the policy commitments within the Department of Education's teacher professional learning strategy (_Learning Leaders_, 2016) relates to building leadership capacity. It states: 'Support and professional learning for school leaders will be strengthened by developing a pathway to leadership, underpinned by new leadership competences' (Department of Education, 2016, p. 14). The Department of Education has therefore established a working group of key stakeholders to look at the development of leadership competences. Outputs from this work are expected during 2020.
3.2.3 There are mechanisms to support schools/higher education institutions to develop strategic plans for teachers' professional learning in inclusive education	**3.2.3.1** A study, entitled _Aspiring to Excellence_, was published in 2014. It reiterated that there should be strong links between ITE and CPD and that teacher education should be 'viewed as a coherent process of professional formation and development', extending beyond and 'building upon initial professional preparation' (Department for Employment and Learning, 2014, p. 4).

Policy priorities	Findings
	It outlined 'four options for the future provision of ITE'. It recommended that, in any revised structure adopted for ITE: *… each higher education institution (HEI) providing ITE should become a major centre for CPD, educational research, curriculum development, school improvement and related professional activities, developed in close association with partner schools and employers*. (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, [Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education](#))
3.2.4 There are strategies to support effective collaboration and joint work between schools and higher education institutions/universities	–

Evaluative comments for 'Continuum of support'

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SECTION 4: CAPACITY BUILDING, FUNDING AND MONITORING OF TPL4I POLICY

4.1 Capacity building

Policy priorities	Findings
4.1.1 There are strategies to increase the capacity of all schools/higher education institutions to support all teachers to engage in professional learning activities on inclusive education	–
4.1.2 There is a mechanism to facilitate dialogue between all teachers/leaders/other stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of inclusive education as an approach that ensures high-quality learning opportunities for all	–
4.1.3 There is guidance on how teachers working in mainstream school settings/higher education institutions can understand and enact inclusive education	–

Policy priorities		Findings
4.1.4	There are guidelines that support all teachers to collaborate to support all learners	–
4.1.5	There are guidelines on how methods of quality assessment, school evaluation, inspections and other accountability measures contribute to planning/identifying priority areas of professional learning activities for inclusive education	–
4.1.6	There are strategies to support schools/higher education institutions to build strong leadership teams that are aware of the inclusive education agenda	–
4.1.7	There are incentives stated in policy for all teachers to engage in professional learning activities for inclusive education	–

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Policy priorities	Findings
4.1.8 There are strategies stated in policy to develop the role of specialist teachers as a resource for mainstream schools	4.1.8.1 *Mainstream schools must have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to oversee provision of teaching and learning for pupils in the school with special educational needs (SEN). These are usually experienced teachers who may acquire a specialist qualification as part of their continuing professional development*. (Eurydice, National Education Systems, United Kingdom – Northern Ireland, [Initial Education for Teachers Working in Early Childhood and School Education](#)) 4.1.8.2 Please refer to [2.2.5.2](#) for further background information.
4.1.9 There are strategies to promote professional learning for inclusion in teachers' common competence areas (e.g. experienced teachers and specialist teachers are expected to engage in professional learning activities that promote inclusive education pedagogies, such as co-teaching)	–

Policy priorities	Findings
4.1.10 There are competences for professional learning in inclusive education for all teachers	–

Evaluative comments for 'Capacity building'

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4.2 Funding

Policy priorities	Findings
4.2.1 There are financial incentives to encourage all schools/higher education institutions to develop policy and action plans for teachers' professional learning for inclusion	–
4.2.2 There are mechanisms for systematic data collection on expenditure on teachers' professional learning that informs cost-effectiveness issues	–

Policy priorities	Findings
4.2.3 There are flexible resourcing mechanisms that foster teachers' professional learning at school level	–

Evaluative comments for 'Funding'

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4.3 Monitoring

Policy priorities	Findings
4.3.1 There is a comprehensive accountability framework for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of teachers' professional learning for inclusion activities	–

Policy priorities	Findings
4.3.2 Monitoring mechanisms ensure that inequalities in access to professional learning opportunities at regional or organisational levels are addressed	–
4.3.3 There are mechanisms to support schools/teacher education departments/higher education institutions to have ownership of review and improvement processes in relation to teachers' professional learning	–
4.3.4 There are mechanisms to share and analyse data to inform improvement processes in relation to teachers' professional learning at national and local level	–
4.3.5 There is data available on whether teachers are engaged in professional learning that is relevant to the level of education they teach	–

Policy priorities	Findings
4.3.6 There are mechanisms to ensure that teachers' professional learning contributes to improving inclusive education practice at school level/the level of a teacher education department or higher education institution	–

Evaluative comments for 'Monitoring'

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