The ‘Equality of Challenge’ initiative was a small-scale post-primary project which aimed to advise the development of support in the area of Exceptional Ability and Dual Exceptionality. It ran from 2008-09 to 2013-14.
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1. **Summary and Background**

The ‘Equality of Challenge’ initiative (EoC) was a small-scale post-primary project which aimed to advise on the development of support by Special Education Support Service (SESS) in the area of Exceptional Ability. It ran from 2008-09 to 2013-14.

SESS took responsibility for in-service CPD in the area of Exceptional Ability (EA) as a category of Special Educational Need (SEN) in 2008-09. There had been no formal CPD provided in this area prior to this and little expertise existed within the system.

Responsibility within SESS was given to then Assistant National Co-ordinator, Dr. Tom Daly. It was decided that best international principles would be applied in the development of a support approach, but that this process would benefit from working closely with some schools on a pilot basic to help ascertain how these principles might best be applied in the Irish context.

Key questions included how support and provision in the area could be developed within Irish inclusion policy and SEN systems in operation in schools.

In this way, the project became a key tool in informing and advising the development of CPD approaches in this area.

The project initially involved just two schools. It had a limited budget and personnel-resources available and at times its continuation from year-to-year was uncertain for a variety of reasons. Because of these factors, it was impractical to develop a multi-annual plan and a flexible approach to the involvement of schools was therefore taken. In all, 15 post-primary schools were to be involved by the time the project ceased at the end of the 2013-14 school year. In this way, the project had three main phases:

- **2008-09** – two schools involved
- **2010-12** – a further eight schools became involved
- **2012-14** – a further five schools became involved and the project was concluded.

**Outcomes Summary:**

The EoC project ran parallel with the development of SESS support in the area of Exceptional Ability, and the outcomes are interlinked to a certain extent. These included:

- The achievement of the objectives of the initiative
- The development of a support structure in the area of Exceptional Ability where none had existed previously
- A refinement of our understanding of the concept of Exceptional Ability
- The development of a pool of expertise in the area, both with the support services and in schools
- A framework of provision in the area that fitted well with inclusion policy in Ireland
- Exemplars of provision that fitted well with SEN systems in Irish schools
- The development of a variety of resources
- Some small-scale but instructive research that was conducted on current awareness and provision in schools
- A resource on Metacognition that was developed in the form of a webcast and manual
- The completion of a variety of dissemination exercises
- The satisfaction of participating schools with the support received from SESS.

**Main Learning and Insights from the Equality of Challenge Project**

- Provision for exceptionally able students, based on accepted international good practice, can work well in the Irish context and within inclusion principles and SEN systems
- In line with international trends, teachers are weak at identifying exceptionally able students without CPD input
- Schools in general are weak in terms of policy, identification and pedagogy, but these improve greatly with support and CPD
- Schools may struggle with policy around issues such as definition and identification. The main guidelines provided by EoC work well:
  - To focus on the NCCA’s concept of Exceptionally Able students as ‘students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those proved for the general cohort of students’
  - To avoid allowing issues around definition and identification to interfere with a focus on provision in the classroom, which tends to be the same irrespective of the former
- Assessment, in the broad sense, is a central element in provision. Where assessment systems were not well developed, the identification of students with EA was problematic.
- Implementing Metacognitive strategies has many positives for both teachers and students
2. National and International Context

This section provides a brief overview of the international and Irish context vis-à-vis exceptionally able/gifted education in which the Equality of Challenge (EoC) was implemented. It is not intended as a comprehensive review and neither does it explore in depth the range of interpretations of the concepts of ‘exceptional ability’, ‘intelligence’ or ‘giftedness’. Rather, it summarises certain differences which exists around these concepts internationally and in Ireland as this is relevant to understanding that broader context in which the initiative was developed.

Various differences and tensions occur around the varying concepts of ‘exceptional ability’, ‘intelligence’ and ‘giftedness’. These may be summarised through the two concepts of intelligence and ability provided by Dweck (1999) – the ‘entity view’ which views intelligence as fixed and stable and the ‘incremental view’ which sees it as malleable, fluid and changeable.

A parallel tension, partially related to concepts of ‘SEN’, was summarised by Skidmore (2004) as the difference between ‘deviance discourse’ and ‘inclusion discourse’, with the deviance discourse focusing on the measurement of a hierarchy of cognitive skills and abilities, and the inclusion discourse focusing on the learning potential of each student to be discovered and stimulated. These contrary views lead to diverging implications ranging from national policy formulation to practice within classrooms.

An overview of the national context in Ireland may begin with the 1993 Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC, 1993). While it uses a mixture of terms including ‘gifted’, ‘talented’ and ‘exceptionally able’, it places these within the concept of ‘special’ as follows:

The more exceptional the ability or talent of an individual pupil, the greater the need for some form of special or supplementary arrangement to assist him/her in developing educationally at a pace and to such extent in breadth and depth as is compatible with capacity. (such pupils) will require special arrangements in addition to the range of education activities which can usually be provided in the ordinary classroom (p. 161).

Reflecting the more contemporary expression of ‘continuum of provision’, it also stated that “the more exceptional the ability or talent of an individual pupil, the greater the need for some form of special or supplementary arrangements to assist him/her in developing educationally at a pace and to such extent in breadth and depth as is compatible with capacity.” (p.161).

In terms of concept and definition, the SERC report appears to have attempted to reconcile the conceptual tensions outlined above. On the one hand, for example, it seemed to apply the incremental theory by drawing on Renzulli’s (1998) model of ‘giftedness’ to describe exceptional ability and talent as “an interaction between three basic human traits – above-average general abilities, high levels of task commitment and high levels of creativity”. On the other hand, it goes on to suggest that “… a high score on an intelligence test remains the single most favoured criterion where such pupils are formally identified” (p. 162). This, of course, measures only one of the three traits above and reflects the entity theory. In other words, SERC did not provide a definitive definition of the concept.

This attempt to reconcile diverging interpretations was continued in the NCCA’s draft guidelines for teachers in 2007 (NCCA, 2007). The evidence of the Equality of Challenge Initiative suggests that this tension is mirrored in schools that tackle a definition for the purposes of developing policy and, in some cases, may struggle in coming to decisions around such matters of concept and definition – for example, whether or not to identify and ‘label’ a cohort of exceptionally able students and, if so, choosing which criteria to apply for so doing.

In terms of the development of provision in this field in Ireland, SERC said in 1993 that “pupils who may be exceptionally able or talented are not formally identified, as such, within the school system” (p. 161). Further provision can be benchmarked from an ‘inventory’ of “Gifted Education in 21 European Countries” produced in 2005 arising from a survey commissioned by the German Ministry of Education (Monks and Pfuger, 2005). The report on Ireland1 outlined the recommendations of the SERC report but added that most schools did not have the necessary resources: “In general, provisions for the gifted are rather rare. No official programs exist. The lack of financial support and teachers’ lack of practical experience constrain the power of provisions.” (p. 84).

However, the report also outlined that the Department of Education was providing approximately €40,000 annually for participation in a Mathematical Olympiad programme and €86,000 each year to The Irish Centre for Talented Youth (CTYI) at Dublin City University.

A Eurydice Report in 2006 on giftedness education in Europe (Eurydice 2006) provided a very basic but useful conceptual framework through which European countries’ provision could be sited. Reflecting the tensions summarised above, it said that countries in general “may be placed on a spectrum with an approach based clearly on mainstream education at one extreme and a far more separatist approach at the other.” (p. 25) At the former end it said that the needs of gifted children are “addressed via a general policy of education based on a differentiated approach and on attention paid to individual pupils in mainstream classes” while, on the other, policy “might be described as highly selective with

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1 Provided by Colm O’Reilly of The Irish Centre for Talented Youth (CTYI), Dublin City University.
the criteria “based on performance and attainment criteria”. The Nordic countries, it observed, were nearest to the former model while some eastern European countries were nearer the latter. In summary, it stated that: “The majority of countries lie between these two extremes and opt for an approach combining measures for integration at school with the formation also of a number of separate groups, particularly for non-school based activity. Virtually all countries enable gifted children to progress through school faster.” Commenting on Ireland, the report said that the concept was viewed restrictively and limited to general intelligence and cognitive ability (p.11).

In 2009 a review of educational policies within 24 European countries, concerning the education of gifted learners and their implications for practice policy, was conducted by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2009). This provides a summary of the relevant legislation in Ireland:

In Ireland the most recent general education legislation (Education Act 1998) included ‘giftedness’ under the definition of the term ‘SEN’. However, this legislation did not provide any specific indication on how gifted pupils could be supported and was not followed by any policy or implementation measures. It simply suggested that pupils with special educational needs should, like all children, receive an education appropriate to their needs and abilities. In contrast, the most recent special needs education legislation (the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004) did not mention or apply to gifted pupils. This reflects the fact that giftedness is not included with special needs education for administrative or resource allocation purposes. (p. 12)

In 2007 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment produced Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers (NCCA, 2007) which, in turn, drew on a comprehensive literature review – Gifted and talented children in (and out of) the classroom (2006).

As mentioned above, the NCCA guidelines acknowledged the conceptual uncertainties outlined in SERC but, again reflecting SERC, placed these pupils within the ‘special’ category: “The term exceptionally able is used in the guidelines to describe students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those proved for the general cohort of students.” (p. 7). As previously mentioned, the guidelines also allowed for ambiguity and flexibility in terms of definition and identification which, in turn, extended to schools’ policies development.

The Centre for Talented Youth, Ireland (CTYI) was established in 1992 ‘to provide for students with high academic ability’ and part of its entrance criteria is an achievement of 95th or higher percentile score relating to mathematical and/or verbal reasoning ability (www.dcu.ie/ctyi). Referring students to CTYI featured highly as a main policy provision in many schools that had addressed the issue, even though concerns were usually expressed about costs. Getting schools to re-focus policy on inclusionary principles and procedures – as for all other SEN categories – was an initial task for EoC.

In relation to actual guidelines for school provision and pedagogy, the NCCA Guidelines, while attempting to navigate a middle ground in terms of concept and definition, provided clear guidelines in terms of school implementation. Taken in conjunction with the Inspectorate’s Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-primary Guidelines (DES, 2007), these provided a very coherent framework from which SESS, as primarily a CPD and support agency, could approach the implementation of the initiative.

In terms of approach, the title of the SESS project – ‘Equality of Challenge’ – reflects that of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education which, after exploring the evolving conceptual basis of inclusion, stated that in common with UNESCO it understood inclusive education in terms of the ‘presence’, ‘participation’ and ‘achievement’ of all learners across the curriculum (IEA, 2010, p. 8). Thus, pedagogical approaches and supports for pupils suggested by SESS lean very much towards the ‘inclusive’ mainstream end of the Eurydice 2006 spectrum mentioned above, rather than towards the ‘separatists’ end.

The context existing in schools could also be described as having been on a spectrum. At one end were those schools that had well-evolved SEN and inclusion systems – where roles and responsibilities were well understood, where there was a comfortable professional parlance around the concept of differentiation, and with good distributed leadership structures. Typically, these schools – having spent a number of years developing their SEN systems – felt that ‘looking after the other end’ was the next logical step in their on-going development. In such cases, the SESS implementation approach fitted
comfortably into existing SEN / inclusion systems. At the other end of the spectrum were those schools whose SEN / inclusion concepts and systems were less well developed. In such cases, the concept of provision for exceptional ability tended to mean maximizing the academic achievement of very good students – such as increasing CAO points – rather than in identifying and focusing on those in the ‘special’ category. Most schools, of course, lay somewhere in between, with uncertainty and some contestation within school where the topic is explored.

In anticipating this context, the project took a twin-track approach at the outset of focusing on ‘people’ development and ‘systems’ development. For example, the value of outlining differentiation strategies to teachers is diminished if teachers do not know who the students with special needs are in their class, or the nature of their particular abilities, needs and related strategies. Such knowledge requires expertise in assessment as well as teachers’ awareness of the range of ways in which exceptional or superior ability may present.

3. **Approach to Implementation and Teacher CPD**

The SESS approach to the project implementation and teachers’ CPD evolved over the three stages of the project – outlined below – but followed some core principles from the outset.

Given that little expertise existed and that significant resources could not be provided to schools by SESS, a prescriptive approach with prescriptive objectives and timelines was not taken. Rather, the project was seen as exploratory, providing support to schools to investigate various aspects of the topic which fitted their particular circumstances, while always focusing on the ‘end game’ of inclusive, differentiated provision in the classroom in line with policy.

Support events organized by SESS for schools, such as workshops for participating teachers, drew heavily on CPD principles such as ‘situated cognition’ and ‘communities of practice’. These shift from a behaviourist view of teacher learning and focus on the concept of teachers, not as individual learners, but as part of interactive systems that include individuals as participants, interacting with each other as well as other parts of the system (Putnam and Borko, 1999).

This approach also moved beyond the once-off, de-contextualized events which are limited in preparing teachers for implementing innovative practices (Ball and Cohen, 1999) to one that is valuable in developing new skills and confidence (Chai and Merry, 2006). However, this approach also requires sustained support over time and the successful facilitation of the process requires that participants move beyond the friendly exchange to include critique and an examination of personal beliefs (Tripp, 2004).

Thus, in practical terms, EoC workshops normally followed a pattern of SESS providing knowledge and suggestions, and then creating safe and trusting forum in which teachers could discuss and share their own understanding and experiences in their schools. The CPD process also took on many metacognitive aspects.

However, although the project did not have the capacity to closely support such learning communities in the schools, it did encourage and support instructional leadership and communities of practice within schools. These worked to varying degrees, depending on internal dynamics.

Notwithstanding this rather organic approach, SESS did outline priorities and anticipated targets for each phase of the project and these are outlined in the sections below.

Along with workshops, SESS provided a range of others supports. These included:

- School visits
- Whole staff presentations in schools
- Through the SESS Supports Scheme, funding was provided to teachers to undertake the on-line course Institute of Child Education and Psychology (ICEP) on ‘Teaching Gifted and Talented Students’.
- For the period 2010-11, SESS provided on class period substitution per week for the school project co-ordinator to help support the project in their school.

4. **2008 - 2009 Phase**

The project began in 2008-09 with just two schools that had approached SESS for support in the area and which had already attempted to make progress in this area. These were Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School in Tralee and Schull Community College in Co. Cork. The initiative set out the following aim:

*The initiative aims to explore a model of good practice which would support and nurture the development of exceptionally able students and to see how general principles could be applied in the Irish context. It also set out to provide a framework and deliverables which could be generalised and used in by schools and teachers in developing their provision for exceptionally able students.*

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6 A flavour of two successful examples are provided from schools’ perspectives in the SESS webcasts on Metacognition, available at [www.sess.ie/metacognition](http://www.sess.ie/metacognition).
A range of potential objectives was also provided as follows:

The objectives of the initiative include the development of:

• professional knowledge and awareness of identification, and of learning and teaching in relation to exceptionally able and dual exceptional students.

• examples of school policy and system development which assist in the identification and assessment of exceptionally able and dual exceptional students.

• examples of differentiated teaching approaches based on an established inclusion policy.

• exemplars of strategies for developing the metacognitive skills of exceptionally able and dual exceptional students.

• awareness of social and emotional issues related to exceptional ability and dual exceptionality, and the addressing of students’ needs in this area.

• strategies of how to develop an environment and culture in which exceptional intellectual ability is accepted and celebrated by peers.

• models and examples of school-based sustainable enrichment activities.

• examples of systems for identifying and supporting socially-disadvantaged exceptionally able and dual exceptional students.

• models of continuing professional development (CPD) which contribute to the learning and teaching of exceptionally able and dual exceptional students.

These two schools had the advantages of having both strong pedagogical leadership – provided by Deputy Principals in both cases – and ‘practitioner catalysts’ (or ‘teacher leaders’). These practitioners – one a mainstream teacher and the other an SEN teacher – were to become a significant resource in this field.

SESS developed an ‘Approach Framework’ (Appendix 1) at this point to help guide the progress of the project. It had a twin-track approach:

• ‘People Development’
  - Knowledge and Principles
  - Methodological Knowledge

• ‘Systems Development’
  - School Policy and Systems
  - Practice-based CPD

The main activities of this year included:

• An initial SESS support visit to the schools and discussions with Principals/Deputy Principals and key staff.

• A workshop with teachers from the schools.

• The SESS Co-ordinator went on a study visit to the UK, hosted by the DfES Inspectorate.

• Some teachers from participating schools did an online ICEP Europe (Institute of Child Education and Psychology Europe) course on Gifted Education.

• Dissemination / CPD presentations were made at an SESS Inclusion Conference and also at the annual conference of the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) – this was introduced by SESS with presentations from both schools on:
  - ‘Dual Exceptionality – a Case Study’
  - ‘Subject-based planning to develop differentiation approaches for the inclusion of students with exceptional ability’

5. 2010 - 2012 Phase

It was decided by SESS to develop the project for a further year and additional schools became involved. Some of these had approached the SESS for support in the area and SESS approached others so as to have a representative sample of schools involved. For example, SESS was anxious to have a school with a very high proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating, so that the project could examine under-identification in this context.

The new schools which became involved were:

• Scoil Dara, Kilcock, Co. Kildare

• Loreto Secondary School, Kilkenny

• St. Clement’s Redemptorist College, Limerick

• Castletroy College, Limerick

• Coláiste Mhuire, Askeaton, Co. Limerick

• St. Leo’s College, Carlow

• St. Colmcille’s Community School, Dublin

• St. Paul’s Community School, Waterford

An initial meeting of Principals was held with the following agenda:

• Introduction and initiative background

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7 These were Jean Johnston from Schull Community College (SEN teacher) and Pauline Burke from Schull Community College (mainstream teacher).
• Review of the project draft framework: its feasibility in scope, scale, structure and approach

•Ascertain the need for SESS input to the schools on the underlying SEN, inclusion and differentiation principles

• Methods of recording of progress and experience within the schools

• The production of ‘deliverables’ and exemplars

• Whole-staff information and possible whole-school approaches

• Development of school policy

• Identification of areas of the framework on which specific schools / teachers might focus

• Management, leadership and support of the participating teachers within the ‘community of practice’ concept

• Dissemination of experience and outcomes

• Possible timescales

• Any other items.

An exchange of expertise and experience between the two initial school involved took place, with a teacher from Mercy Mounthawk Secondary schools talking to teachers in Schull Community School about differentiation, and a reciprocal visit with a workshop on assessment.

Increased interaction and discussion among teachers was further encouraged in line with the CPD strategies outlined in 4 above. As an example, schools where staff undertook to do the on-line ICEPE course on Gifted education were encouraged to do so collectively, and to meet and discuss each module as it was completed. In another school, a group of teachers undertook to do the Second Level Support Service (SLS) seminars on Assessment for Learning (AfL), again on a collective basis. Such approaches, where implemented, led to the groups involved in becoming cohesive agents of change with a shared professional language around learning and approaches to teaching.

SESS continued to support the schools through workshops and school visits, and a review was carried out at a teachers’ workshop in May 2011. The main outcomes of this review were:

• All the schools were satisfied that the initiative had been positive for their schools

• The schools were satisfied with the supports provided by SESS

• Progress was made in most aspects of the initiative

• The complexity of definition and identification remains a difficulty for some schools

• Less progress was made in development of actual teaching practice

• A list of priorities was drawn up:
  - Differentiated teaching methods and approaches
  - Assessment
  - The development of School Policy
  - Social and Emotional Issues
  - Internal CPD in schools
  - Tracking and monitoring of students

6. **School Survey on Existing Provision**

In 2010 SESS conducted a small-scale survey in order to provide a pin-picture of provision for Exceptionally Able and Dual Exceptional (EA/DE) students in Irish post-primary schools, along with school systems that support it, so that the EoC approach and development and provision might be guided by a somewhat informed picture of the situation.

This survey was carried out during a series of full-day post-primary seminars on Exceptional Ability which were presented by SESS and a total of 35 questionnaires were completed by personnel from schools which were represented. As such, the survey was limited in scale.

Twenty-five questions were asked, arranged in three themes on:

• Policy and Knowledge

• Structure and Organisation

• Learning and Teaching

Four options were provided for answers to the questions on each theme:

• Yes (provision is developed in this area)

• To a large extent

• To a limited extent

• No (provision is not developed in this area)

The full survey is provided in Appendix 2 but, to summarise, the results can be distilled into ‘Largely Yes’ and ‘Largely No’ answers. These results showed relatively low levels of development in schools in all three areas. For example:

• In the ‘Policy and Knowledge’ section, 91% answered ‘Largely No’ to the question: *Staff has knowledge of the concept and definitions of Exceptional Ability.*

• In the ‘Structure and Organisation’ section, 71%
answered ‘Largely No’ to the question: Most teachers know who the EA/DE students are in their classes and are aware of the range and nature of their abilities.

- In the ‘Learning and Teaching’ section, 74% answered ‘Largely No’ to the question: Lesson content is generally differentiated to take account of the needs of EA/DE students.

The following table provides further a further summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Largely Yes</th>
<th>Largely No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy and Knowledge</td>
<td>37 (15%)</td>
<td>203 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Organization</td>
<td>71 (23%)</td>
<td>237 (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Teaching</td>
<td>69 (22%)</td>
<td>239 (78%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that the respondents were from schools which had elected to send a representative to the seminar, and that therefore these schools may be more developed in this particular area, it can be speculated that the results from this cohort of schools could be more positive than what might result from a more representative sample of schools.

While the results have to be treated tentatively given the small sample, they suggested much scope for development in this area.

7. 2012 - 14 Phase

The project’s continuance was uncertain during the latter part of 2011-12 as SESS was not in a position at the time to commit to its continuance. This resulted in a reduction in activity but in 2012-13 it was decided that the project would continue for a further two years. However, some SESS supports were not continued, such as the one class period of substitution per week for schools. New schools also became involved at this stage.

- Mount Saint Michael Secondary School, Claremorris, Co. Mayo
- Cross and Passion College, Kilcullen, Co. Kildare
- St. Aidan’s Comprehensive School, Cootehill, Co. Cavan
- St. Brigid’s Secondary School, Killarney, Co. Kerry
- Ballinamore Post Primary School, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim.

Some schools became inactive during the project for a variety of reasons: e.g. some felt that their provision had become adequately developed, or changes in personnel or resource issues in schools.

Nine schools in all were involved during 2012-14 and a number of priorities were set out for the period:

- School Policy
- Differentiation in the classroom
- Social and Emotional Issues
- Internal CPD in schools, in parallel to SESS supports
- Assessment
- Tracking and monitoring of students
- Metacognition

A ‘School Project Plan Template’ was provided to help schools in planning their activities (Appendix 3) and SESS supports continued along the same lines, including two workshops per year for a representative from the schools and school visits where requested. The workshops followed the same CPD strategy as outlined above. For example, the agenda for a 2012 workshop included a number of short, 10-minute presentations by SESS, each of which was followed by input from each of the participating teachers on their progress and experience in this area, along with discussion and sharing of practice and ideas. These presentations focused on:

- Differentiation and Individualised Instruction for Literacy
- Differentiation: Creating Challenge in the Classroom
- Assessment
- Acceleration
- School Policy
- Social and Emotional Issues
8. Outcome, Learning, Resources and Dissemination

Main Outcomes
SESS considers that the main purpose of the initiative had been successfully achieved – i.e. it helped to advise SESS on the development of a support structure in the area of Exceptional Ability and Dual Exceptionality.

By the end of the project period SESS had a comprehensive range of supports in place, where there had been none before, and much expertise was developed. The initiative was very helpful in this regard.

Through exploring the practicalities of applying internationally-recognised principles to the everyday Irish context and conforming to Irish policy on inclusion, the project provided a clear picture on what a school with good provision in this area ‘looks like’ – i.e. how its systems of assessment, differentiation and support might work.

The project also helped us to refine our understanding of the concept of ‘Exceptional Ability’, which comes with a variety of titles and understandings: e.g. ‘Giftedness’, ‘Gifted and Talented’, etc. Along with this, it provided a clear insight into the ‘SEN’ dimension of exceptional ability and how it works well in practice within a special needs understanding in Irish schools.

Participation in the initiative also had a positive impact on the school involved and the type of CPD provided sometimes resulted in the impact going beyond the immediate EA/DE area.

Some additional outcomes in the form of additional learning, resources and dissemination are outlined below.

Main Learning
Many schools are unsure initially about what they mean by ‘exceptional ability’ and interpretations of the concept can vary within the school. For example, some initially see the field as a means of giving very good academic students a form of additional ‘boost’ rather than provision for those within the ‘special’ category. Schools attempting to improve provision face immediate practical questions such as:

- ‘What is the definition’?
- ‘How do we identify the pupils’?
- ‘Do we tell the parents and/or the students’?
- ‘Do we actually give them a category’?
- ‘What activities should we have for them’?
- ‘Is there a danger of elitism’?

Schools can also struggle with policy formation around issues but the project found that its main advice works well:

- To focus on the NCCA’s concept as ‘students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those proved for the general cohort of students’ (NCCA 2007) – this helps teachers to conceptually see them within the SEN category.
- Not to let issues around definition and identification take away from the focus on developing provision in the classroom, which tends to be the same irrespective of the former.

As the project developed it became clear that the area of Assessment was very important – e.g. that appropriate teaching was difficult without identification of students and their particular traits, strengths and needs. This was even more important in relation to dual exceptionality.

In line with international trends it was found that schools teachers are weak at identifying exceptionally able students without CPD input. For example, very able and high-achieving students tended to be identified even though they may have not been within the category while other ‘types’, such as those who had become frustrated, disaffected and disengaged, lay outside the understood accepted concept. Again in line with international findings, these issues improved greatly with support and CPD.

A small-scale study conducted by SESS in 2010 – outlined above in Section 6 – suggested that, without CPD input, schools in general were weak in terms of knowledge and policy in the area, in terms of assessment and identification systems, and in terms of differentiated pedagogy.

The project also found that it was necessary for schools to keep a constant focus on inclusion – i.e. that the main provisions should be in the form of differentiated pedagogy in the mainstream classroom.

As with in many other aspects, the Leaving Certificate and the points system tended to dominate thinking, with the Leaving Certificate being seen as ‘the end game’, and without an understanding that some exceptionally able students may be underachieving even though ‘scoring’ very highly in the points system – i.e. that the Leaving Certificate was putting a ‘glass-ceiling’ on expectations.

The project also found that without CPD there was a limited understanding of the social and emotional issues which are related to EA, and that it is especially beneficial to have somebody in the school with a more advanced understanding of these.

Much work was done in the area of Metacognition as part of the project and metacognitive strategies were identified early as being potentially fruitful. In 2009 SESS
commissioned Dr. Sarah McElwee, University of Oxford\textsuperscript{8}, to assist in the development of a resource for schools which was finalized by SESS in 2009 as ‘\textit{Metacognition for the classroom and beyond: Differentiation and support for learners}’.

In Sept. 2009 the initiative ran a workshop on metacognition for Equality of Challenge teaches, at which Dr. McElwee attended, and schools subsequently explored the strategies. These proved successful for both teachers and students. SESS subsequently developed a seminar for teachers which was later developed as a webcast – further details below.

While including a section for those with additional needs, the webcast covered Metacognition in general as it was found that it is relevant to all areas and to some recent priorities such as School Self Evaluation, Assessment for Learning, Junior Cycle reform, etc.

**Main Resources**

A variety of resources were developed during the course of the project.

- The main resource outcome is probably in the form of pool expertise developed in the area, both within SESS and without.

- Seminars on EA/DE were also developed and are available, and learning from the project contributed strongly to these.

- Some specific resources were developed by schools and are available on the SESS website – an ‘\textit{Index Examples of Practice from the Equality of Challenge Initiative Schools}’ – is provided in Appendix 4, along with a URL.

- Other materials from the project are also available on the project website - www.sess.ie/equality-challenge

- A manual for teachers on Metacognition was developed - ‘\textit{Metacognition for the classroom and beyond: Differentiation and support for learners}’\textsuperscript{9}. This was envisaged as an initial ‘Version 1’ which would be subsequently developed using learning from the project – this is subject to available resources.

- An additional webcast was developed on Metacognition in general, with specific sections on its use with students with additional learning needs. It is available at:
  
  www.sess.ie/resources/metacognition

**Main Dissemination**

Various forms of dissemination took place. Conference presentations included:

- The conferences of the Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) in 2009, 2010 and 2012

- The Network of School Planners conference, 2010

- SESS Principals’ Seminar

In 2010 the Equality of Challenge project was presented as the Irish Case Study in a CIDREE report on ‘Curriculum Provision for Exceptionally Able Students’ (CIDREE, 2010).

Various additional lectures and talks were given to which learning from EoC were included, including an annual lecture to post-graduate students at the Church of Ireland College of Education and to post-graduate students in Mary Immaculate College of Education, 2015.

The SESS website (www.sess.ie) is perhaps the main dissemination resource.

9. Review of SESS Support to Schools

Given the nature of the structures and resources of the project, there was no external evaluation process but SESS continually assessed the project through its normal evaluation procedures.

The feedback was continually very positive. As an example, at the final Teachers’ Workshop in May 2014, SESS requested the teachers to provide feedback in writing on the support they received from SESS during the project. This was structured flexibly, with pointers provided such as “what worked well” and “what didn’t work so well”. Some extracts are provided below and the full feedback is provided in Appendix 5.

- The meetings [workshops] were informative and enlightening

- Visits to our school were full of practical support, speaking directly to our situation on the ground

- We also appreciated the teaching methods which were of benefit to all students and not only the exceptionally able.

\textsuperscript{8} Dr. McElwee had authored the background document to the NCCA's 2007 guidelines – ‘Gifted and talented children in (and out of) the classroom’ (NCCA, 2006).

\textsuperscript{9} Available at: www.sess.ie/sites/all/modules/wysiwyg/tiny_mce/jscrip.../pdf

• Through the project we changed our system of assessment

• The first year it didn’t seem as if we had done. Three years later we have a clear identification system and lots of teaching strategies in place across the school

• The whole project has raised the awareness of EA students in the classroom but also the language of EA/DE – it is now used every day in the school

• Assessment – we are changed to CAT2 test due to the project

• The online course that we did, supported by SESS, was extremely helpful as a starting point.

• The distribution, discussion and methodologies at the meetings were very helpful

• There was nothing that was unhelpful

• It has changed the way this department (SEN) is perceived by both students and teachers. It has created a more balanced view of Additional Educational Needs and this is a positive shift in thinking.
10. **Appendix 1: Initial EoC Implementation Framework**

- **Knowledge and Principles**
  - Specific knowledge and principles
  - SEN principles
  - *SEN Code of Practice* guidelines
  - Literature

- **Methodological Knowledge and Practice**
  - SESS CPD agencies
  - S接下来's CPD strategies
  - *NCPA Guidelines*
  - Practice-based CPD

- **School Policy and Systems**
  - As part of normal whole-school development
  - SEN policy and systems of management

- **Learning and Teaching Environment - Issues to Consider**
  - Differentiation strategies
  - Home involvement
  - Social and emotional issues

- **Potential School Implementation Strategy**
  - Develop implementation group to acquire specific knowledge and lead implementation of classroom-based strategies — e.g., with incoming first-year cohort. Lead related systems development — e.g., identification and in-school planning, in part of SEN policy. Create organizational structures for implementation group. Provide support and scaffolding for implementation group via peer support and community of practice principles. Review and develop whole-school strategy.

- **School Management and Leadership**
  - Etc.

- **Identification, Planning, Support, and Acceleration**
  - Identification, planning, support
  - *Equality of Acceleration Activities*

- **People Development**

- **Systems Development**

- **Co-ordination**
  - Principal and key personnel (e.g., SEN and school planning teams as part of normal planning and development process)

- **Practice-based CPD**
  - Supported, context-based CPD, possibly a community of practice, principles
  - Sharing of practice
  - Peer mentoring and co-teaching

- **Appendix 1: Initial EoC Implementation Framework**

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**Equality of Challenge Initiative - Approach Framework**

**Developing Provision for Exceptionally Able Students in Post-primary Schools**
### 11. Appendix 2: School Survey on Existing Provision 2010

**Table 1. Questions and Responses by Number**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>To a large extent</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>To a limited extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a written policy on Exceptional Ability/Dual Exceptionality (or included within other policy), and it is shared with all staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. There is a general awareness of the need for specific provision for Exceptionally Able / Dual Exceptional (EA/DE) students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Staff has knowledge of the concept and definitions of EA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Staff has knowledge of the different profiles of EA/DE students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Staff has knowledge of the concept of Dual Exceptionality</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Subject policies (if used) include guidelines for working with EA/DE students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. There is general knowledge and awareness of the specific social and emotional issues related to EA/DE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. There is a system in place for identifying EA/DE students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. There is a teacher or team in the staff who take a lead in relation to EA/DE students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The SEN / Learning Support teacher(s) play a role in identifying EA/DE students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The SEN / Learning Support teacher(s) advise mainstream staff in relation to the learning and teaching of EA/DE students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Most teachers know who the EA/DE students are in their classes and are aware of the range and nature of their abilities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Subject planning specifically takes EA/DE students into account</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The progress of EA/DE student is formally recorded and monitored</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Professional development of staff has included a focus on the learning and teaching of EA/DE students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. There is a system in place for supporting the social and emotional needs of EA/DE students as necessary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Lesson content is generally differentiated to take account of the needs of EA/DE students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. High expectations are set for EA/DE students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. EA/DE students are grouped together for specific subjects (e.g. maths) or activities as appropriate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Most teachers adjust pace of work to take account of the rapid progress of some EA/DE students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. EA/DE students are given extra time to extend or complete work when required</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Teachers generally liaise with the subject coordinators, year heads or heads of departments in instances where the EA/DE student requires a curriculum challenge</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Most teachers set specific differentiated homework for EA/DE students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. EA/DE students have opportunities to work independently with guidance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. ‘Extra-curricular’ enrichment opportunities for EA/DE students are linked with the curriculum</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 11. Appendix 2: School Survey on Existing Provision 2010

**Table 2. ‘Largely Yes’ and ‘Largely No’ Responses by Question**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Largely Yes</th>
<th>Largely No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There is a written policy on Exceptional Ability/Dual Exceptionality (or included within other policy), and it is shared with all staff</td>
<td>6 (18%)</td>
<td>28 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. There is a general awareness of the need for specific provision for Exceptionally Able / Dual Exceptional (EA/DE) students</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
<td>24 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Staff has knowledge of the concept and definitions of EA</td>
<td>3 (9%)</td>
<td>32 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Staff has knowledge of the different profiles of EA/DE students</td>
<td>3 (9%)</td>
<td>32 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Staff has knowledge of the concept of Dual Exceptionality</td>
<td>6 (18%)</td>
<td>27 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Subject policies (if used) include guidelines for working with EA/DE students</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>31 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. There is general knowledge and awareness of the specific social and emotional issues related to EA/DE</td>
<td>5 (15%)</td>
<td>29 (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. There is a system in place for identifying EA/DE students</td>
<td>7 (21%)</td>
<td>27 (79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. There is a teacher or team in the staff who take a lead in relation to EA/DE</td>
<td>13 (38%)</td>
<td>21 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The SEN / Learning Support teacher(s) play a role in identifying EA/DE students</td>
<td>12 (35%)</td>
<td>22 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The SEN / Learning Support teacher(s) advise mainstream staff in relation to the learning and teaching of EA/DE students</td>
<td>7 (20%)</td>
<td>28 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Most teachers know who the EA/DE students are in their classes and are aware of the range and nature of their abilities</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
<td>25 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Subject planning specifically takes EA/DE students into account</td>
<td>5 (18%)</td>
<td>28 (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The progress of EA/DE student is formally recorded and monitored</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>31 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Professional development of staff has included a focus on the learning and teaching of EA/DE students</td>
<td>6 (18%)</td>
<td>28 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. There is a system in place for supporting the social and emotional needs of EA/DE students</td>
<td>7 (21%)</td>
<td>27 (79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Lesson content is generally differentiated to take account of the needs of EA/DE students</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
<td>25 (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. High expectations are set for EA/DE students</td>
<td>15 (44%)</td>
<td>19 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. EA/DE students are grouped together for specific subjects (e.g. maths) or activities as appropriate</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
<td>26 (74%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Most teachers adjust pace of work to take account of the rapid progress of some EA/DE students</td>
<td>10 (29%)</td>
<td>24 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. EA/DE students are given extra time to extend or complete work when required</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>29 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Teachers generally liaise with the subject coordinators, year heads or heads of departments in instances where the EA/DE student requires a curriculum challenge</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
<td>30 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Most teachers set specific differentiated homework for EA/DE students</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>32 (97%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. EA/DE students have opportunities to work independently with guidance</td>
<td>5 (15%)</td>
<td>29 (85%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. ‘Extra-curricular’ enrichment opportunities for EA/DE students are linked with the curriculum</td>
<td>9 (26%)</td>
<td>25 (74%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Appendix 2: School Survey on Existing Provision 2010

Table 3. Summary of ‘Largely Yes’ and ‘Largely No’ Responses by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Largely Yes</th>
<th>Largely No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy and Knowledge</td>
<td>37 (15%)</td>
<td>203 (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and Organisation</td>
<td>71 (23%)</td>
<td>237 (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Teaching</td>
<td>69 (22%)</td>
<td>239 (78%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OVERALL

Key: Largely “No” | Largely “Yes”
### Issues to Consider for Planning

| 1. | Particular Objectives or area(s) of work? |
| 2. | Scope – what is realistically feasible and what are the parameters and limitations? |
| 3. | What information and CPD is needed for staff – how will it be provided? |
| 4. | Who will become involved and who can do what? |
| 5. | What SESS support is needed? |
| 6. | How will it lead to better learning and teaching – any measurables? |
| 7. | How will we document our progress? |
| 8. | What are the timescales, and success criteria for each stage? |

### Possible Areas of Work to Focus On

| 1. | Differentiation strategies and practices in mainstream classes, with a focus on differentiated higher-order learning and teaching (e.g. extension tasks for exceptionally able students) |
| 2. | Development of school policy and its enactment |
| 3. | Assessment practices and its various elements including identification, tracking, planning, etc |
| 4. | Social and emotional issues |
| 5. | Using metacognition strategies and teaching metacognitively |
| 6. | Individualised planning for students with exceptional ability and/or dual exceptionality |
| 7. | Case Studies |
| 8. | Any Other |

### Suggested Timeline

- **Dec. 2012 – Planning Workshop**
- **Feb/March 2013 - School support visits by SESS and planning meetings**
- **Feb/May – School planning and preparation, CPD**
- **May 2013 – Planning Workshop – finalised school plans**
- **Aug/Sept. 2013 – SESS whole-school input if feasible**
- **Oct. 2013 – Planning Workshop**
- **Oct 2013 - on-going SESS school visits/support**
- **Jan 2014 – Workshop with focus on capturing exemplars/progress**
- **April 2014 – Final Workshop / Evaluation / Dissemination Plans.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Project Plan Template: Guidelines for Project Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Timeframes for Actions
- When does the action or task need to be undertaken or completed?

### Action or Tasks Description
- You may find it helpful to number each action.

### Who is responsible?
- Who will have the lead responsibility for the actions?

### Resources needed?
- What resources are needed for the action?

### Comments:
- Including progress and adjustments needed to keep on track.
A System for Identifying and Assessing Students with Exceptional Ability and Dual Exceptionality in Post-primary School

A system and procedures for identifying and assessing students with exceptional ability and dual exceptionality is necessary if suitable provision is to be made for their unique needs. A template emerged from the early activities of the Equality of Challenge schools which is based on the system developed in Schull Community School in Co. Cork, along with input from other schools in the initiative who are also examining their methods.

‘Jacob’ – a Case Study of a Student with Dual Exceptionality
(School Name Withheld to Protect Anonymity)

Some students are ‘dual exceptional’ in that, while they may have a disability which negatively effects some aspects of their learning, they may also have an exceptional ability in other aspects. Such students are often un-recognised as their disability may mask their ability.

As illustrated in this case study of a student with ‘dual exceptionality’ in one of the Equality of Challenge schools, an effective assessment and communication system in school may make identification and appropriate intervention much more efficient.

How Assessment Outcomes can be Conveyed to Staff
(by Helen Ryan, Castletroy College, Limerick)

Schools develop different systems for conveying the outcomes of assessment procedures to staff. Helen Ryan, from Castletroy College in Limerick, outlines ways in which this process takes place in Castletroy College and also describes the review process.

Interpreting Testing Scores
(by Jean Johnston, Schull Community School, Co. Cork)

Mainstream teachers may have difficulty in understanding test scores carried out by specialist teachers and in interpreting their relevance. As part of the assessment system in Schull Community School, Jean Johnston provides advice to mainstream teachers on the interpreting of test scores – for example, through a presentation at a staff meeting and through a document such as this. This process helps teachers to better understand test results which are available as part of the schools’ assessment system.

Differentiated Extension Activities in Maths for Exceptionally Able Students
(by Helen Ryan, Castletroy College, Limerick)

One of the more effective ways of making inclusive provision for exceptionally able students is through extension tasks in mainstream classes. This example of subject planning for exceptionally able students through extension activities is in the area of maths.

Students Learning about Metacognition through Research
(by Stephanie O’Regan, Lucy Hunt and Katie O’Donoghue – students in Schull Community School, Co. Cork)

Arising from development in the area of Metacognition – ‘learning how to learn’ – a number of students in the school engaged in a study of their peers’ learning processes and styles. While this was an extension and enrichment activity in the fields of mathematics and the sciences, the task also encompassed skills and strategies common to many areas such as the application of higher order cognitive skills, the use of the scientific approach and self-directed learning.
School-Based CPD for Developing Exceptional Ability
(by Pauline Burke, Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School, Tralee, Co. Kerry)
In looking at the continuing professional development (CPD) of staff in order to address the needs of exceptionally able students, Mercy Mounthawk school initially developed a small ‘Community of Practice’ which piloted differentiated approaches in the school.

Teachers Doing Metacognition: Individualised Support for Students through Metacognitive Strategies
(by Pauline Burke, Mercy Mounthawk Secondary School, Tralee, Co. Kerry)
In spite of introducing differentiated methodologies which worked well for most students with exceptional abilities, teachers found that some students were still not realising their potential and engaging fully with learning and teaching in the school. The introduction of Metacognitive strategies proved to be a useful response to this dilemma.

Developing the Use of Differentiation as a Strategy
(by Norma O’Brien, Coláiste Mhuire, Askeaton, Co. Limerick)
By examining their assessment and identification approaches, teachers in Coláiste Mhuire realized that the identification of exceptionality in students required a number of approaches. They also discovered that, by adopting particular inclusive differentiation strategies, they could create learning spaces where students could exercise courage and creativity without being inhibited by a fear of failure. The use of these approaches benefited all the students and enthused the teachers in their work.

Subject Planning for the Exceptionally Able
(Science Department, Castletroy College, Limerick)
The Equality of Challenge schools found that one the best ways of developing teaching practices for students with exceptional ability and dual exceptionality is to work through subject departments and subject planning.

This example, from the Science Department in Castletroy College in Limerick, provides an overview of the Science teachers’ approach to subject planning in this regard. This approach is described in the schools’ plan as follows: “In most cases, the needs of exceptionally able students are best delivered as part of the normal differentiated classroom provision. There are a number of ways that work can be differentiated and this is included in the individual subject department plans.”
14. Appendix 5: Qualitative Feedback from Schools on SESS Support

Teacher 1
- We got first-hand info and facts – proof that EA can be catered for and should be catered for – ideas and strategies for that.
- Framework for identifying EAs students in our classes – tracking their performance.
- It brought metacognition to the fore and gave us the platform to bring new ideas to the classroom.
- By attending the seminars we were able to report back to the school to both management and staff – the professional ideas for teaching and also ideas from other schools.
- We received very good handouts which provided good material for classroom charts.
- The in-service by [name of SESS Associate] and ongoing support provided was excellent.
- Meeting other teachers helped in enriching the classroom experience for exceptionally able students.

Teacher 2
The on-line course was taken by four teachers in our school. Very interesting content and discussions. Timeframe for completion (for certification) was restrictive. It provided a basis for a presentation to the whole school staff which was received with positivity.

The meetings [workshops] were informative and enlightening. It was great to hear from other schools about what worked well. It was also very inspiring to spend time discussing learning and teaching strategies.

Visits to our school from the SESS were a great support. We worked on our assessment for incoming first years and really valued the help and advice from [name of SESS Associate and Advisor]. We also appreciated the teaching methods which were of benefit to all students and not only the exceptionally able.

Teacher 3
Helpful:
- Creating a forum for discussion.
- Providing information on a variety of methodologies to facilitate EA/DE students.
- Suggestions on extending awareness amongst staff.
- Visit to school helped to direct strategies being used.
- Students with EA being recognised and challenged.

Need to:
- encourage use of resources on website so that work continues.

Teacher 4
The aim: to raise awareness amongst staff of exceptionally able students in a DEIS school.

Through the project we changed our system of assessment and also included teacher referral to firstly identify those students.

We has support of [name of SESS ANC] – coming to our school for Croke Park Hours, and followed up from [name of SESS Advisors]. The first year it didn’t seem as if we had done a lot and we were putting things in pace. Three years later we have a clear identification system and lots of teaching strategies in place across the school. Each classroom has a Bloom’s Taxonomy and there has been CPD in differentiation for all staff, subject specific.

I suppose we need support in continuing to highlight these students and the various teaching strategies etc, and any other developments.
The whole project has raised the awareness of EA students in the classroom but also the language of EA/DE – it is now used everyday in the school.

A lot of the strategies – e.g. Wait Time, Think/Pair/Share – are not new by any means, but staff do need regular emails to remind them to continue with these.

In a DEIS school, it is very important to highlight the EAS students and continuously encourage them and differentiate for them – to improved educational attainment and educational progression (which are measured in the DEIS plan every year) as there are many supports in place for the weaker students.

I really like the point that projects don’t end, the evolve into something else – can really see this from DEIS to SSE, etc.

**Teacher 5**

SESS Support

- Supports with examples of methods

- Exceptionally Able conference in Tralee was excellent. Got a document on guidelines and used this to help guide our teachers in methodologies.

- School visits can be helpful.

- Informal meetings with other schools involved in the project can be very helpful – hearing from what other schools are doing

**Teacher 6**

- Students coming from all over due to excellent SEN team

- Team Teaching – less able – no streaming

- Looking after underachievement

- Pushed school towards looking after more able

- Groups – more able Must/Should/Could

- Reflect – which methodology is best

- Raise awareness in all of school

- Assessment – we are changed to CAT2 test due to the project

- WRAT 4 – Spelling

- Tracking of students from results

- Hope to support them in mentoring

**Teacher 7**

Concerns:

- Identification:

- Fears of elitism – allayed because of results

Strategies

- Learning outcomes

- Peer work
  - Tests were set from students’ own evaluation
  - Set questions in pairs

- Extension exercises
  - Set questions in pairs

- School policy formulated

- Keeping records

- Tracking students – supporting from 1st year

- Meet with students from 4th year

- Awareness of ‘pastoral care’ element

- Pilot school 12 years ago –

- SEN team and committee for EoC – teachers share strategies – PQRS, think/pair/share

- Problem: how do you make a student who is exceptionally able in one area, but not in another

- Ratification of EoC policy
Teacher 8
What was most helpful from SESS Support?

- Supports from (names of SESS ANC and Advisor) to the school as a sounding board and help to devise programme. The distribution of information to the all staff was very helpful.

- The online course that we did, supported by SESS, was extremely helpful as a starting point.

- The distribution, discussion and methodologies at the meetings were very helpful. The workshops gave us an opportunity to discuss ideas and formulate lesson plans with the G&T in mind.

- The information we got about the CAT3, tracking and monitoring have become very helpful.

Suggestions for the future:
Keeping the awareness and support provided going through the SESS

Teacher 9
Reflection on what has helpful / unhelpful

- There was nothing that was unhelpful

- The initial visit by (name of SESS ANC) who talked to the whole staff about metacognition and Equality of Challenge was very useful in raising awareness among the staff, and in a sense set the ball rolling

- Visits were full of practical support, speaking directly to our situation on the ground

- Strategies and methodologies discussed during the workshops were very helpful.

Subsequently provided by email:

Thank you for all of your support and guidance during this programme. I have learned a lot and I know I still have a lot more to learn. I think that it is fair to say that teachers in our school have now been awakened to the presence/and needs of the exceptionally able students in our classrooms. Whether individual teachers choose to cater for them or not is another matter entirely.

In addition to this, the teachers in our school also recognise the importance of identifying those needs as being an important part of school life and an integral part of the role of the Additional Educational Needs Department. This is very important for me because it has changed the way this department is perceived by both students and teachers. It has created a more balanced view of Additional Educational Needs and this is a positive shift in thinking. I firmly believe that the understanding of the need for equality of access is currently embedded in our school community. To my mind, that is a very good result and my thanks again both to [names of SESS personnel] for being instrumental in bringing this about.

Very sorry the project is at an end. It has been a catalyst for hugely positive change in my teaching. Sincere thanks to Jean and Tom (and Helen) for all their hard work.

The initiative was of great benefit to the staff and students in our school. We really appreciate the advice, support, resources and the opportunity to learn from other teachers.
15. References


- Eurydice (2006), Specific Educational Measures to Promote all Forms of Giftedness at School in Europe (Working Document). Brussels: Eurydice European Unit.


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