Q SKILLS AND QUEST
FOR LEARNING REVIEW

Contents

1 Context and Background

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the **PrereQuisite Skills** and **Quest** *for learning* resources, and to allow CCEA to hear the views of principals, practising teachers and other stakeholders on these resources and thereafter to identify any potential updates or future developments which could be implemented.

The **Prerequisite Skills resource**, more commonly referred to as **Q Skills**, is an assessment framework to support teachers and classroom assistants. The skills described in the resource build towards Level 1 in the Cross-Curricular Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT. The Q Skills provide a broad and inclusive framework for assessing learners, taking into account their age, cognitive ability, learning difficulties and other significant complex needs.

The requirements outlined in the Q Skills for Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT have been developed to align with the mainstream Levels of Progression and are broken down into five skill areas. These range from Experience (Q1), Respond (Q2), Engage (Q3), Actively Participate (Q4) to Consolidate (Q5). Within each of the skill areas, learners' progress can be demonstrated by moving through the Q Skills as well as adults decreasing their levels of supports within a skill.

Sitting alongside the Q Skills is the Q Skills software, designed to complement the Q Skills assessment resource. The software allows learners' progress to be tracked and measured, enabling teachers to support the individual's needs within their classroom and report developments to parents/carers as well as using this information for transitioning purposes.

The second set of materials reviewed through this project is **Quest** *for learning* which is a guidance and assessment resource intended to support teachers and classroom assistants of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), providing ideas for, and pathways to, learning. This resource contains non-statutory assessment materials and guidance to assess learners aged 3–19 years with PMLD. They are intended to provide an appropriate context to celebrate the different abilities of learners with complex needs, rather than trying to 'shoehorn' them into an existing framework which has not been developed with their needs in mind.

In addition, CCEA have developed Quest software to complement the Quest assessment tool. Quest software provides a system for recording and monitoring individual learner progress and presenting the information on a learner in both textual and graphical forms. Quest software also gives the opportunity for learners' progress to be monitored over different time periods, where teachers may view information on all learners in their school's Quest system.

2 Methodology

In this project the data, which can be found in the Appendix, has been gathered and evaluated through a mixed method approach. Overall, the intention of this approach is to analyse the data obtained via the methods above and to use this information to feed into future decision-making around planning and support for SEN teachers.

This incorporates the following:

2.1 Online Q Skills questionnaire

On 4 February 2020, an online link to the Q Skills questionnaire was sent to the CCEA Primary Subscriber list, comprising 1,282 individuals, and the CCEA SEN Subscriber list, comprising 251 individuals. Both lists contain teachers from the Irish Medium sector.

The questionnaire was also actively promoted across all CCEA's social media channels and responses closed on 28 February 2020, with 44 respondents having completed it. All three Education Authority (EA) localities were represented in the responses.

The Prerequisite Skills or Q Skills were introduced in 2007 and the questionnaire's introduction indicated that it would assist CCEA in assessing how well this assessment framework is working and how teachers and schools can be supported in the future development of it.

Through the questionnaire, CCEA sought views on:

- the use of Q Skills, including its ease and frequency of use;
- the use of alternative assessment frameworks;
- the use of Q Skills recording software;
- assessing progression; and
- assessing progression from Quest *for Learning* to Levels of Progression.

2.2 Focus groups with practising teachers including principals

Six separate focus groups gave stakeholders the opportunity to provide further feedback and more detailed responses to the questions around Q Skills. In total, 38 principals and practising teachers attended, allowing for the capture of specific feedback from teachers using the Q Skills Assessment Framework.

An additional Focus Group Event for Quest *for learning* took place on 12 March with a further nine attendees present. Those attending were teachers from the SEN sector and currently employed to teach learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD).

CCEA sought views on the following:

- the purpose of Q Skills and Quest *for learning*;
- the level of detail in Q Skills and Quest;
- the functionality of Quest and the use of Quest Recording software;
- how Quest meets the needs of those learners for whom it was created;
- experience of using alternative assessment frameworks for learners with PMLD; and
- potential developments and adaptations for Quest.

3 Key Points from Q Skills Questionnaire

Please note that the detailed findings from the Q Skills Questionnaire can be found in the Appendix, which contains the full evaluation report.

Forty-four respondents in total completed the questionnaire, the majority of who stated that they were currently using, or had previously used, the Q Skills Framework. Just under two-thirds of those indicated that they use the Q Skills either on a monthly or termly basis.

There was general agreement that the Q Skills are easy to use, with a few commenting on a requirement for staff training. Just under half of the respondents identified that they had used the additional Q Skills Recording Software features. The majority of respondents noted that they had not received any Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in relation to the Q Skills Recording Software and those who did receive training cited CCEA or the Education Authority as the training providers. Respondents agreed that the Q Skills Recording Software allows teachers to access all the information in one place, with some commenting on the convenience of this.

Most respondents indicated that the Q Skills Framework is fit for purpose, following on from Quest, and agreed that there is appropriate progress towards the statutory Levels of Progression.

In relation to the content of the descriptors, there was agreement that these contain appropriate detail and that the coverage of skills is sufficiently wide. However, a number of comments suggested there could be further, more age-appropriate examples included, particularly to cover other skills sets and to cater for learners who will remain at that level.

Responses suggested that Q Skills had a 'Considerable Impact' or 'Moderate Impact' on the teaching and learning of learners, the breadth of curricular experience, and learner progress. Qualitative comments indicated that the Q Skills provide a useful method for assessing learners and setting learners' individual targets.

The majority of respondents agreed that the language used in the Q Skills is clear and unambiguous. A small number of qualitative responses suggested that the language could be clearer, and more concise.

Most respondents agreed that finding supporting evidence when making assessment judgements was straightforward. However, some respondents either disagreed or were undecided. Additional qualitative comments noted that the overall process was easy, particularly as recording information with an iPad was convenient.

There was agreement from the respondents on the usefulness of Q Skills in helping to make reliable and consistent judgements about the progress of learners; helping to highlight

where to make improvements to the teaching and learning of pupils; reporting to parents; and informing future planning.

Almost half of those indicated that the Q Skills require updating, including providing greater clarity around some of the language in mathematics.

The majority of respondents felt that there was a need for further professional development on Q Skills, specifying, for example, a refresher course and updates on the use of Q Skills software.

4 Key Points from Q Skills and Quest *for learning* focus groups

The detailed findings from the focus group meetings can be found in the Appendix, which contains the full evaluation report carried out.

Using Q Skills and Quest

When Q Skills were first introduced, they were welcomed by teachers of learners with learning disabilities, who felt that they gave access to some form of assessment for those learners not yet working at Level 1 in the Levels of Progression and where learners would have previously been reported as 'Working towards Level 1'. Historically this had been very demotivating for both learners and teachers. It communicated a negative message, indicating that no progress had been made.

Attendees at the Quest focus group also agreed that it was difficult to allocate time to teaching and learning when the basic needs of learners take up so much time. However, the common view was that Quest is appropriately flexible to allow teachers to accommodate the needs of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD) and severe medical issues.

Teachers reported that Q Skills is a valuable assessment tool in tracking learner progress and building a profile providing opportunities for both parents and learners to see development. All groups commented on the change in intake to SEN schools since the production of Q Skills, with many pointing out that the profile of their learners in SEN settings had changed significantly, as the intake now includes learners with much more complex needs than would have been evident 10 years ago. Due to this changing profile within special schools, many pupils with moderate learning difficulties are now attending mainstream primary schools, and those teachers representing such schools felt that the Q Skills have also been useful in that setting.

The Q Skills provide the ability to record progression, regression and spikes in pupils' learning. One teacher commented that the ability to present the information in such a graphical form with photographic evidence was beneficial, as some parents may have found the more traditional form of reporting inaccessible.

One principal illustrated how the Q Skills Framework has been used to update the Board of Governors and ensure that they discharged their statutory obligation as governors.

All teachers were emphatic about the value of Quest *for Learning*, citing that they believed that there was no other educational resource that so fully met the assessment needs of their learners with PMLD. Collectively they felt that the Quest resource and its associated targets were well suited to their learners with PMLD. Some teachers commented that learners often 'plateau' on targets and thereby demonstrate limited progression.

The teachers felt that there is appropriate progression for learners transferring from Quest and those learners who are moving to the statutory Levels of Progression. However, they also believed that the Q Skills still require updating.

The attendees reported that there are clear progression routes from Quest *for Learning* to Levels of Progression. The Q Skills is very useful as a planning tool, and whilst designed to be an assessment tool rather than a curriculum tool, it is also a good reference for classroom activities. A few attendees commented on the repetitive nature of Level Q5, while others saw this as an essential feature to consolidate the skills which learners had acquired in previous levels. A few teachers commented on the perceived jump from Q5 to Levels 1 in the Levels of Progression.

Teachers agreed that Q Skills can be effectively used in post primary, but would welcome more age-appropriate examples to engage learners. Some teachers also commented on the usefulness of the Quest resource when learners are transitioning from one class to another.

Schools had some concerns about data protection legislation relating to the collection of evidence through photographs. While schools have policies in place they would welcome guidance on this and also on the number of time and the amount of reporting of progress that is actually required.

Embedding Q Skills and Quest in schools

There was a huge inconsistency in how Q Skills had been embedded in schools. Some teachers were fully committed to using Q Skills and regularly accessed the framework, recognising the value of ongoing observation. Others reported used Q Skills termly. In a minority of schools, teachers pointed out that they had tried to embed the Q Skills but felt that, in some cases, they lacked time, and commitment from teachers to do so.

Staff turnover was cited as one of the primary factors preventing full commitment to Q Skills; it is difficult for teachers to develop their knowledge of Q Skills if they are not in a permanent, long-term post. Newly qualified teachers are not always aware of the range of resources and materials available and have a limited knowledge of Q Skills, having had little or no exposure to the resource during initial teacher training. In addition, those teachers who initially trained in Q Skills may have retired or left, so their expertise and experience has been lost.

Some primary and post-primary respondents highlighted that there has been a lack of comprehensive training courses focusing specifically on Q Skills since the materials were initially delivered, resulting in some teachers lacking confidence in how it should be used.

One teacher shared a good practice model used in her weekly school 'Club' when teachers work together, helping to create a culture of ongoing assessment.

Another commented that the initial response from staff had been hesitant, but that they now feel it has improved their practice, while another remarked that Q Skills were well used in her school and had transformed parent-teacher meetings as parents can 'see' their child's achievements.

Limitations of Q Skills and Quest *for learning*

Many of the teachers agreed that it is difficult to find an assessment framework that suits all learners. The impact of the short-of-strike industrial action was discussed, and how this has resulted in the implementation of Q Skills being restricted or deferred. One recurring point at all focus group meetings (as outlined above) was that newly qualified teachers have little or no knowledge of Q Skills.

Some attendees expressed the view that the jump between, for example, Levels 4 and 5 in Using Mathematics is too wide, and additional steps may need to be included. Some learners reach their maximum level and will not progress further; the range of examples included in each level is not wide enough to accommodate these learners, and teachers are required to expand on the examples to broaden their experience.

Other suggestions included incorporating additional skills areas such as personal, social and physical development skills as well as functional skills into Q Skills. Attendees also

recommended the inclusion of a section on 'Readiness to Learn', which many feel is increasingly a prerequisite for their learners.

Teachers discussed the inability to officially record more practical information, for example, where a learner learns to wash their hands independently or controls angry outbursts. It was felt that a future development of Q Skills, which encompasses such skills, is necessary to fully represent learners and to address their developmental needs. The language used in the Q Skills should encompass how learners can transfer skills to real-life situations. Teachers suggested that learners can complete tasks in the classroom but extending these to real-life situations can be difficult for pupils with learning disabilities.

The teachers who were surveyed said that it would be useful if Quest could be aligned more closely to the current IEP targets. They explained that a new pilot of these targets is being trialled at present and the intention is that these will be changing from September (to be known as Personal Learning Plans (PLPs). Ideally the teachers would like to see these PLPS linked to SIMS and able to accommodate reporting on the Quest Framework. Teachers would also like the Quest software to be linked to Q Skills software and to other software applications used in schools.

Attendees commented that there was enough information available on Q Skills for parents. They also suggested that the development of some media-based materials (for example, a short video outlining the purpose of Q Skills) would be beneficial for parents. Increasingly, schools are facing challenges where English is not the first language in the home, so reports need to be adapted to accommodate this.

Some of the examples provided in the Q Skills were not considered to be at an appropriate level for older learners, particularly those in post-16 learner settings.

Similarly, one of the main issues for those teachers of learners with PMLD is the 'composite' and 'recurring' nature of their classes – in extreme instances, learners could remain with the same teacher for up to eight years: the norm was four years. In such situations, a few teachers indicated that in order to supplement the examples, they had adapted the materials to avoid repetition and to ensure that they were more age appropriate. All teachers identified the importance of the broadening of the experience when learners were demonstrating 'plateauing.' Additional examples or opportunities to share their own 'in-house' developed resources would be useful.

Widening the Q Skills

It was felt that Using Mathematics and ICT Q Skills were clear and easy for teachers to follow. Due to the nature of the learners being assessed through Q Skills, their profile will often appear 'spiky' and some teachers commented that it is not unusual for some learners

to have progressed to the Levels of Progression for Using ICT, whilst remaining on Q Skills for Communication and Using Mathematics.

Attendees commented that, due to the more subjective nature of the Communication Q Skills, some statements may be misinterpreted, and further clarification would help. A number of attendees suggested that the examples in each level should be broadened and that the ability to track personal and social development, considered 'the most important area in our school' would be advantageous.

Whilst it was recognised that Q5 in Q Skills provides opportunities for 'generalising', learners can often struggle to do these things out of context.

Using the recording software and the requirement for training

Some of the attendees of the focus groups were not aware of the Q Skills Recording Software. It was reported that a few of the teachers found the Q Skills Recording Software difficult to set up and those who had received training felt that this had been very beneficial. There were questions raised about the availability of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Of those who did have familiarity with the Q Skills Recording Software, almost all of the respondents were satisfied with its ease of use. Some teachers found it difficult to setup the software and were subsequently reluctant to revisit it. Others saw it as an effective management tool, providing principals with easy access to learners' records, and something which could be shared with parents, as required.

One comment, repeated at several Q Skills focus group events, was that it would be useful to have a software package that provides teachers with a 'one-stop shop' that would cover all aspects of a learner's education, including planning, progress, and reporting information to parents.

Teachers felt that the Quest software resource should allow for the demonstration of regression, as this is a common developmental feature for learners with PMLD. (The attendees were unaware that the software incorporated this facility.)

The attendees at the Quest focus group said that they had limited experience of using the software, indicating this was due (in part) to some initial technical difficulties; lack of familiarisation with the software; and lack of time. Many of the teachers explained that they used Quest to enable them to make an assessment judgement but, in addition, used a different application to share this information with parents/guardians. (The use of Apps

such as Seesaw and 2Build A Profile was discussed.) One school described its use of Pinterest to share resources internally.

One teacher expressed concern that the previous system should not be shut down as she felt that her school did not have enough time/capacity to move the stored materials from the existing system into the new software.

Continued industrial action has impacted on engagement with the Quest resource, particularly the introduction of the software, as this was considered to be a new initiative. This has made it difficult to measure its usefulness or how it has transformed practice.

All of the teachers made comments in relation to CPD associated with Quest. A few of the more experienced teachers pointed out that they had received some initial training and more recent support in using the software, but had not managed to implement this fully. However, there was concern that many teachers in receipt of the original training had now either retired or moved to other teaching positions. The expertise therefore was lost.

Two recently qualified teachers explained that they were told to use the Quest software, without any prior training or exposure to it through initial teacher training. They were required to familiarise themselves with this and found this process very difficult and isolating, as both are teachers of PMLD learners and have a limited number of colleagues working with learners with such complex needs.

The teachers valued the opportunity to share ideas through this focus group meeting. They strongly recommended that a virtual network/forum should be established through which they could share good practice, topic ideas and adapted exemplar material to meet their learners' needs: thereby reducing their sense of isolation. Making judgements about learners' progress across 43 milestones was felt to be challenging, and again, isolating.

Teachers were unaware of the online Training Tutorials on the CCEA website.

5   Areas for Exploration and Action: Future Developments in Q Skills and Quest *for learning*

Feedback from this CCEA project has identified a number of areas for exploration and action by CCEA and other potential stakeholders.

Recommendations	Areas for Exploration and Action by CCEA
Professional Development	
i) Provide re-familiarisation with Q Skills for all teachers.	• Refresher training for CCEA Education Managers (initially to familiarise CCEA staff and promote the resource). • Update flyers to all centres, including primary and SEN schools, highlighting all available Q Skills resources including software options. • Work with partners through the Learning Leaders Strategy to identify potential CPD opportunities for existing and beginning teachers.
ii) CPD: Teachers want to remain up-to-date and have access to professional learning opportunities. They require access to professional development opportunities for monitoring and reporting progress of learners with SEN.	(As outlined previously in the Curriculum Monitoring Report): • continue to work with partners through the Learning Leaders Strategy to identify effective ways to maximise professional learning opportunities, including efficient use of School Development Days; and • work with partners responsible for teacher professional learning to ensure that professional development opportunities focus on appropriate pedagogy.
iii) Initial Teacher Training: Beginning teachers are unfamiliar with Q Skills, having no exposure to this resource during Initial Teacher Training.	• Work with partners in Initial Teacher Training institutions to ensure that trainee teachers have awareness of Q Skills.
iv) Improve communication about resources and support: teachers are not always aware of the range of resources and materials available.	• Produce a co-ordinated and regular media campaign, including more frequent use of social media targeted at Primary and SEN sector.

Adaptations to the Q Skills	
v) Increase the breadth within the Q Skills levels to accommodate learners who have reached a 'plateau' and appear to be making limited progress.	• Establish a working group of SEN practitioners to identify the feasibility and/or requirements for reviewing/broadening the Q Skills levels.
vi) Include aspects of Personal Development in Q Skills (Emotional wellbeing, Life skills, Tracking the development of play, Progress in how to form attachments, etc.).	• Establish a working group of SEN practitioners to identify the possibility of adapting Q Skills Frameworks to align with other existing assessment tools and incorporate a wider range of skills.
vii) Include examples which are more age appropriate, which cater for older learners, and are respectful of their interests.	• Refresh the Q Skills exemplar activities and provide more illustrative activities for a range of age groups.
viii) Increase the focus on functional skills that are transferrable to real-life situations. For schools who struggle with adapting assessment examples, increased examples would be useful.	• Develop guidance on a functional curriculum to complement Q Skills. • Include assessment examples related to the functional curriculum.
ix) Extend the scope of Q Skills to accommodate post-16 .	• Identify areas within existing pre-entry qualifications. • Publish material relating to PEER Assessment. • Revisit/Refresh existing SEN Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities progression maps which aim to help develop their skills for lifelong learning and to operate effectively in society. • Consideration of adapting and mainstreaming other schools' examples. • Liaise with other curriculum development organisations and awarding bodies, providing courses that develop skills for learning, work and life.
x) Approaches to teaching Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities should be more implicit than explicit, with the skills being seen as intrinsic rather than teachers employing specific strategies for their development.	(As outlined previously in the Curriculum Monitoring Report): • in the longer term, explore and disseminate educational thinking in relation to valid assessment of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities and link to the Q Skills Framework; and

	• embed the existing SEN Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework/progression maps within Q Skills.
Networking and Sharing of Good Practice	
xi) More help with making assessment judgements through provision of a Moderation Hub with exemplar videos.	• Give consideration to the creation of a Moderation Hob, used for helping to embed standards and clarify nuances in the Q Skills.
xii) Development of a central resource area.	• Develop an area for schools to share assessment activities and exemplars.
xiii) Sharing existing school-produced resources. Teachers reported that these should be developed in each school and used as part of their internal moderation, and then shared through a central portal.	• Creation of an SEN forum.
xiv) Additional guidance on the collection of evidence through photographs as well as the number of times and amount of reporting of progress, deemed to be sufficient.	• Communication with schools in relation to GDPR policy and suggested parameters in relation to collection of evidence.

Software Developments	
xv) Updated information in relation to previous glitches and fixes for teachers would be useful for the recording software.	• Updated Help sheets for teachers to provide hints and tips recommending, for example, restricting the use of video clips to a maximum of 15 seconds.
xvi) Q Skills software to be linked to Quest software and to other software applications used in schools. • SIMS C2K links • Seesaw-type home/school function • Alignment to Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) (from the Department as part of new statementing process) • Ability to transfer learner data between schools when a learner moves on.	• Continue to liaise with C2K re development in SIMs to ensure alignment between Quest and Q Skills, especially in light of new PLPs coming into effect. • Work with Multimedia to upload and refresh YouTube videos already developed. • Consideration of the feasibility of aligning the range of applications.
xvii) Required: A software package that provides teachers with a 'one-stop shop' that would cover all aspects of learner's education, including progress, planning and providing information to parents.	• As above, consideration should be given to the feasibility of aligning a range of applications, including reporting information for parents.
xviii) The reporting software should include a 'child- friendly' reporting page to allow learners to discuss their targets and achievements. Possibly a daily report to help learners see that they are keeping on track with graphical adaptations.	• Investigation of the requirement/feasibility of inclusion of such features.

APPENDIX 1:
CCEA QSKILLS EVALUATION REPORT

CONTENTS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An evaluation of CCEA's PrereQuisite Skills (Q Skills) and Quest *for learning* was carried out on behalf of CCEA's Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Team. The Q Skills and Quest *for learning* are assessment tools to support teachers and classroom assistants who are teaching pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The skills described in the resource build towards Level 1 in the Cross-Curricular Skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT.

An online questionnaire and focus groups formed the structure of this evaluation. Forty-four respondents completed the online questionnaire, and 39 principals and teachers attended the focus groups. Below is a summary of the key points from this evaluation.

1.1 Key Points

1.1.1 Online Questionnaire

- A third of respondents (N=15 out of 44) used the Q Skills to assess more than 20 learners.
- The highest number of respondents (N=15 out of 44) use the Q Skills once a term.
- Respondents (N=29 out of 44) agreed that the Q Skills was easy to use.
- The majority of respondents (N=28 out of 44) were aware of the Q Skills and use these in their school.
- A third of respondents (N=15 out of 44) had used the Q Skills Recording Software.
- The majority of respondents (N=28 out of 44) had not completed any Continued Professional Development (CPD) in relation to the Q Skills.
- Of the 15 respondents who use the Recording Software, the majority (N=6) use it to record 6–10 learners.
- The majority of applicable respondents (N=14 out of 15) found the Q Skills Recording Software was easy to use.
- Almost half of applicable respondents (N=7 out of 15) agreed the Q Skills Recording Software reduced the time spent recording.
- All of the respondents (N=15 out of 15) who used the Q Skills Recording Software agreed that it allowed teachers to access all the information in one place.
- The majority of respondents (N=31 out of 44) agreed that the Q Skills Framework meets the needs of learners for whom it was created.
- Respondents (N=24 out of 44) agreed there was appropriate detail contained in the descriptors in the Q Skills.
- It was also agreed that the coverage of skills is sufficiently wide (N=22).
- Respondents agreed that the Q Skills had a positive impact on the following:
- teaching and learning of pupils (N=31 out of 44);
- breadth of curricular experience (N=29 out of 44); and
- pupil progress (N=31 out of 44).

- The majority of respondents (N=29 out of 44) agreed that the language used in the Q Skills is clear and unambiguous.
- Respondents (N=24 out of 44) agreed that they found it straightforward to find supporting evidence.
- Almost half of those (N=15) who responded to this question agreed that the Q Skills required updating.
- The majority of respondents (N=15 out of 44) agreed there was a need for further professional development on using the Q Skills Framework.

1.1.2 Focus Groups

- When the Q Skills were introduced, it was welcomed by teachers in the SEN Sector.
- Q Skills provide an education for learners who are not yet at Level 1 of Levels of Progression which is rich in elements from the curriculum.
- There was great variation in how Q Skills have been embedded in schools; some schools were fully committed to using the Q Skills and have regular input. Other schools were using the Q Skills once a term, while some schools have tried to embed the Q Skills but lacked the time and commitment from teachers to do so.
- Some of the Q Skills communication statements were considered unclear and potentially subjective.
- It was agreed that it is difficult to find an assessment structure that fits all learners.
- A number of attendees of the focus groups were not aware of the Q Skills Recording Software.
- Teachers commented that Q Skills Recording Software can be difficult to establish and may require training for some teachers.
- They felt that there is appropriate progression for learners transferring from Quest and those learners who are transferring to Levels of Progression.
- However, some felt that the Q Skills still require updating.
- Quest was flexible enough to accommodate the needs of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Attendees at the Quest focus group also agreed that it was difficult to allocate time to learning and teaching when the basis needs of learners take up so much time.
- However, teachers wanted Quest to have the functionality to permit any regression to be recorded, and the precise reasons for this.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background/Rationale

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of CCEA's 'PrereQuisite Skills' (Q Skills) and Quest *for learning*, carried out in February and March 2020.

The Q Skills, introduced in 2010, are an assessment resource to support teachers and classroom assistants. The skills described in the resource build towards Level 1 in the Cross-Curricular Skills for Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT. The Q Skills provide a broad and inclusive framework for assessing learners, taking into account age, cognitive ability, learning difficulties and other significant complex needs.

The requirements outlined in the Q Skills for Communication, Using Mathematics and Using ICT align with the mainstream Levels of Progression, and are broken down into five skill areas.

These range from Experience (Q1) to Consolidate (Q5). Within each of the skill areas, learner progress can be demonstrated by moving through the Q Skills, as well as decreasing levels of supports from adults within the skill.

Quest *for learning* is a guidance and assessment resource to support teachers and classroom assistants of learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), providing ideas for and pathways to learning.

2.2   Role of the Research & Statistics (R&S) Unit

CCEA's R&S Unit is an independent department within CCEA and has a proven record of providing high-calibre research and evaluations to support and inform the development of products, markets and services. The unit designs and provides customised research and evaluations to facilitate managing delivery, accountability and quality.

The R&S Unit was commissioned to develop an online evaluation questionnaire to assess the Q Skills Framework, facilitate the Q Skills/Quest focus group events, and analyse the subsequent findings.

2.3   Report Structure & Interpretation of Tables

This report details the key findings obtained from the questionnaire and the focus group events. The structure of the remainder of this report is as follows:

- Section 3: Methodology
- Section 4: Results
- Section 5: Conclusions.

Please note, the value *'N'* in the report is the number of actual responses to the items presented, described, or illustrated. In some instances, where respondents were asked to give multiple responses to an item, *'N'* may be greater than the total respondent figure.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Online Questionnaire

A link to the online questionnaire was sent to all schools, and the questionnaire was also publicised through CCEA's social media accounts. The questionnaire was live from 3 to 28 February, 2020. In total, 44 completed responses were received during this time; the demographics of this response are detailed below.

3.1.1 Demographics

Table 1: Respondent Role	
	Frequency
Teacher (Special School)	N=22
Teacher (Mainstream School)	N=12
Teacher (SEN Unit)	N=5
Vice Principal	N=1
Principal	N=2
Other[1]	N=2
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

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[1] Other Included: SENCO teacher/ASD teacher

Table 2: School Type & Key Stage

	Frequency
Special School (Key Stage 1)	N=12
Special School (Key Stage 3 and 4)	N=11
Primary with SEN Unit	N=4
Primary Mainstream (Key Stage 1)	N=10
Primary Mainstream (Key Stage 2)	N=1
Special School (Key Stage 2)	N=6
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Table 3: Locality

	Frequency
1. Fermanagh & Omagh, Mid Ulster, Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	N=13
2. Derry City & Strabane, Causeway Coast & Glens, Mid & East Antrim, Antrim and Newtownabbey	N=11
3. Belfast, Lisburn & Castlereagh, Ards & North Down, Newry and Mourne & Down	N=20
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Table 4: Management Type

	Frequency
Controlled	N=12
Catholic Maintained	N=11
Integrated	N=4
Special	N=10
Other	N=1
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

3.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups were held at three locations across Northern Ireland for both principals and teachers. The table below details the dates of the focus groups, the location of the meetings, and the number of attendees.

Table 5: Principal Focus Groups

Date of Focus Group	Location	Principals in Attendance
24 February 2020	CCEA Belfast	N=10
28 February 2020	Lisanally Special School	N=6
3 March 2020	Ardnashee Special School Derry/ Londonderry	-
Total	**-**	**N=16**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Focus Group Attendance Records (2020)

Table 6: Teacher Focus Groups

Date of Focus Group	Location	Teachers in Attendance
24 February 2020	CCEA Belfast	N=11
28 February 2020	Lisanally Special School	N=10
3 March 2020	Ardnashee Special School Derry/ Londonderry	N=6
Total	**-**	**N=27**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Focus Group Attendance Records (2020)

Table 7: Quest Focus Group[2]

Date of Focus Group	Location	Teachers in Attendance
12 March 2020	CCEA Belfast	N=6
Total	**-**	**N=6**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Focus Group Attendance Records (2020)

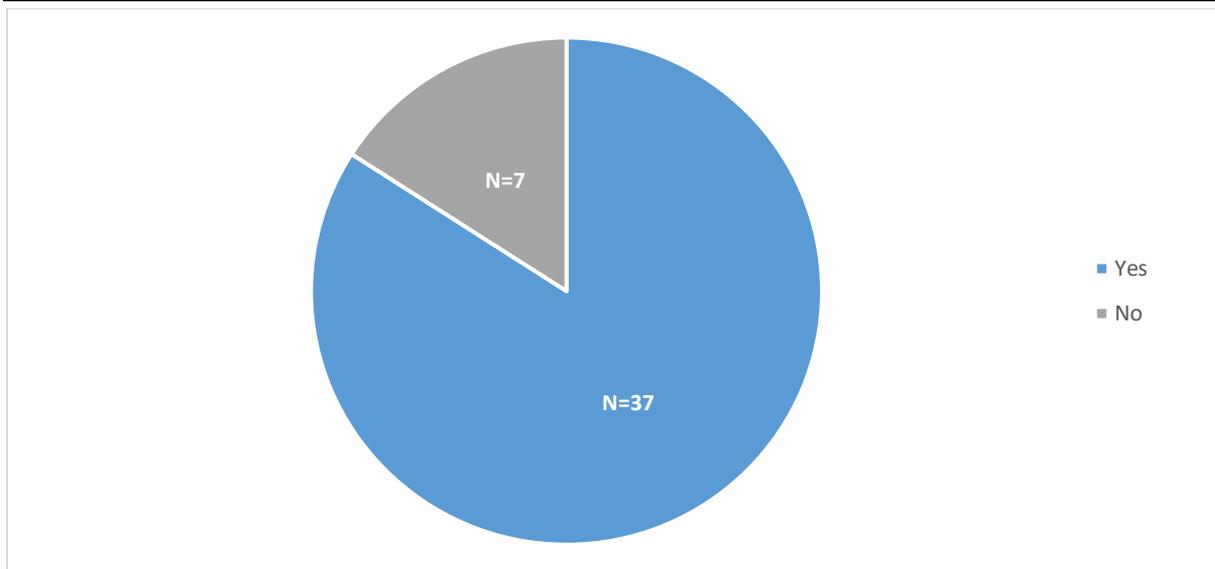[2] Please note: this focus group included both principals and teachers.

4.0 RESULTS

This section of the reports details the results from the online questionnaire (N=44) and focus groups (Principals N=16, Teachers N=33).

4.1 Online Questionnaire

4.1.1 Using Q Skills

Figure 1: Number of respondents who use (or have previously used) the Q Skills Framework
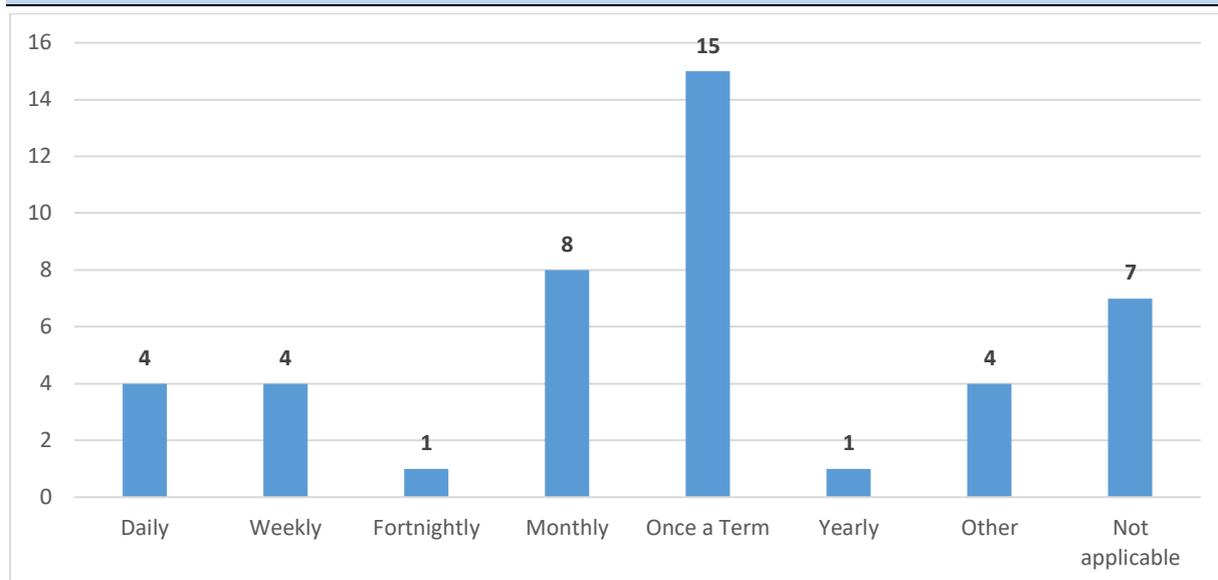

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

As illustrated in the figure above, the majority of respondents (N=37) reported either currently or previously using the Q Skills Framework.

Figure 2: Number of learners where respondents indicated that they have assessed using Q Skills
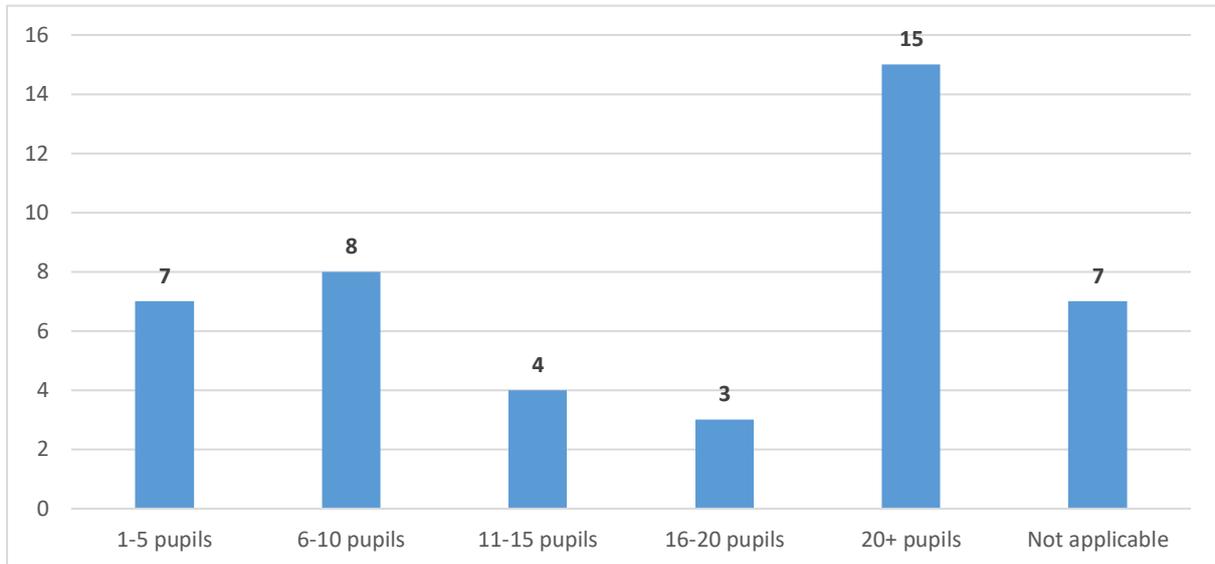
Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

In total, around 40% of applicable respondents (N=15) stated that they have used the Q Skills to assess more than 20 learners, whilst the majority of the remaining respondents (N=15) reported using the Q Skills to assess between one and 10 learners.

Figure 3: How often respondents use Q Skills[3]

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Just under two-thirds of applicable respondents (N=23) stated that they use the Q Skills either on a monthly or termly basis.

Table 8: Respondents' ratings on the Q Skills and their ease of use

	Frequency
Very Easy	N=9
Easy	N=20
OK	N=5
Difficult	N=3
Very Difficult	-
Not Applicable	N=7
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Respondents (N=29) generally agreed that the Q Skills are easy to use. Respondents also provided additional comments the Q Skills and their ease of use, these are categorised below.

The Q Skills:

- are easy to use (N=7);
- can be time consuming (N=3);
- require training for staff, and staff commitment (N=3); and
- have gaps in the levels (N=3).

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[3] Other responses included: six-week cycle in line with IEP (N=1) and twice yearly (N=1).

Table 9: Respondents' awareness of assessment frameworks			
	I am aware of this	**I am aware of this and its purpose**	**I am aware of this and its purpose, and use it in school**
Q Skills Framework	N=6	N=10	N=28
Levels of Progression	N=6	N=12	N=26
Quest Assessment Framework	N=17	N=11	N=16
Interactive Levels of Progression	N=17	N=15	N=12

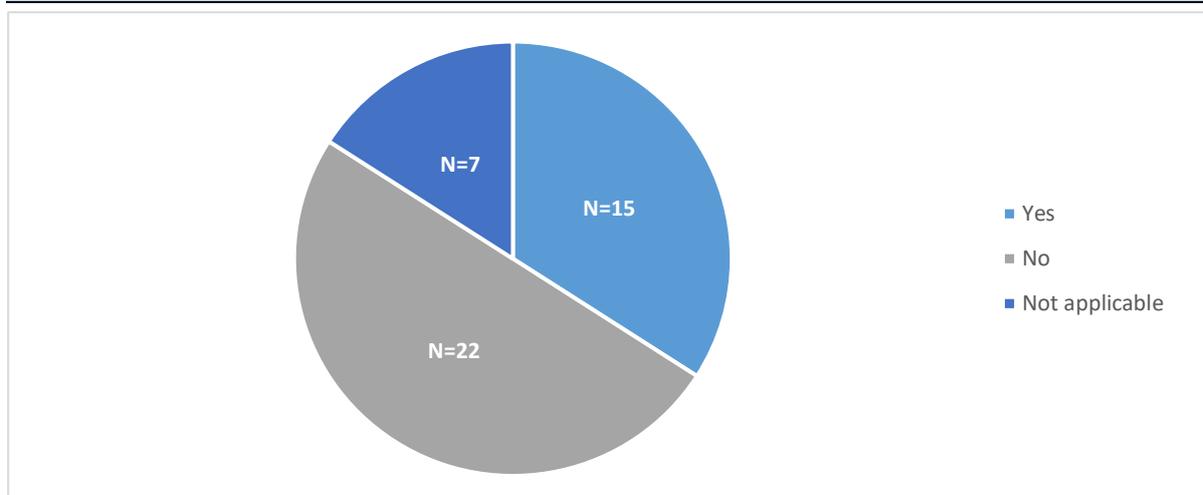*Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)*

The majority of respondents (N=28) were aware of the Q Skills and use these in their school, whilst a further ten were aware of it and its purpose, although they did not use it in school. Similar numbers of respondents (N=28) were aware of the Levels of Progression, while 12 respondents were aware of their purpose, but did not use them in school. Fewer respondents (N=16) were aware of the Quest Assessment Framework, and did not use it in school. Just over a quarter of respondents reported using the Interactive Levels of Progression.

Respondents were asked to provide details of any other assessment frameworks they have used; these are listed below:

- Separate Assessment Framework;
- B Squared Asdanp Scales;
- Boxall;
- Princes;
- OCR Accredited Courses;
- Quest;
- Levels of Progression;
- Individual Education Plan (IEP);
- Psychoeducational Profile (PEP3);
- Parents in Partnership (PIPS);
- P Scales;
- Standardised Tests;
- TEACCH Preschool Assessment Framework; and
- Arvalee school assessment.

4.1.2 Q Skills Recording Software

**Figure 4: How often respondents use Q Skills**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Around 40% of applicable respondents (N=15) noted that they had used the Q Skills Recording Software; however, the majority of respondents (N=22) noted that they had not used the software even though they assess students using the Q Skills.

Respondents were subsequently asked whether they had received any Continued Professional Development (CPD) in relation to the Q Skills Recording Software. The majority of respondents noted that they had not received any CPD. Those who did receive training in

relation to the software (N=9) were asked to comment on the provider, with most citing CCEA or the EA.

Figure 5: Number of learners recorded using the Q Skills Recording Software
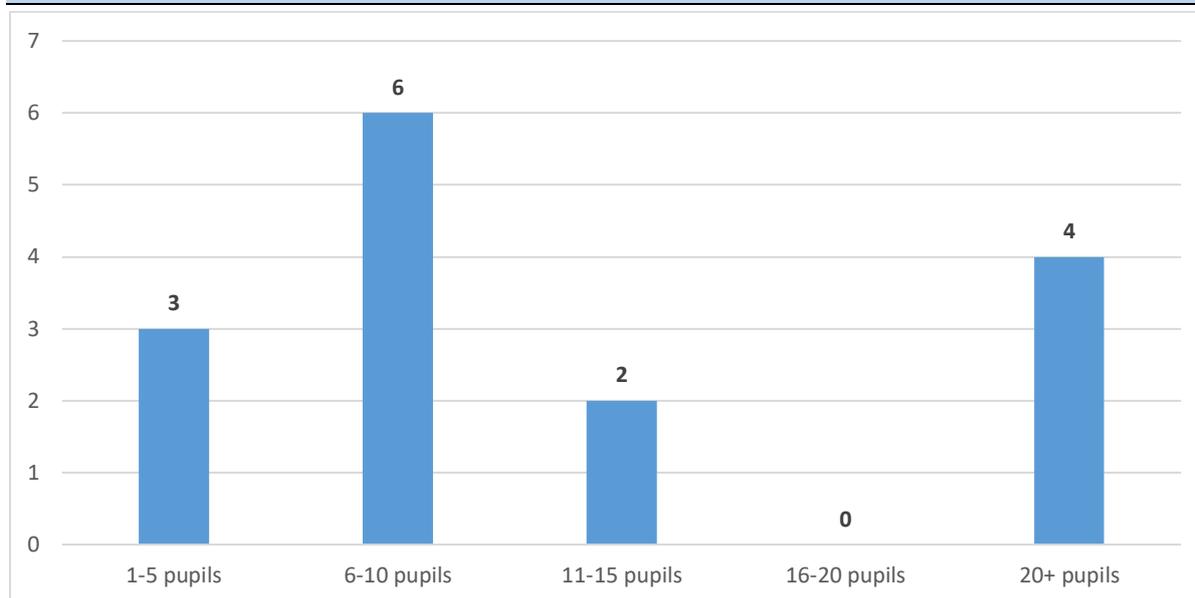
Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

The majority of respondents (N=9) noted that they record information for between one and 10 learners on the Q Skills Recording Software.

Table 10: Respondents' ratings on the Q Skills Recording Software and their ease of use

	Frequency
Very Easy	N=4
Easy	N=5
OK	N=5
Difficult	N=1
Very Difficult	-
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Almost all of the respondents (N=14) found the Q Skills Recording Software was either 'Very Easy', 'Easy' or 'OK'. Respondents were asked to provide additional comments in relation to this; however, there were not enough comments to constitute a theme.

Figure 6: Number of respondents who required technical help in order to use the Q Skills Recording Software
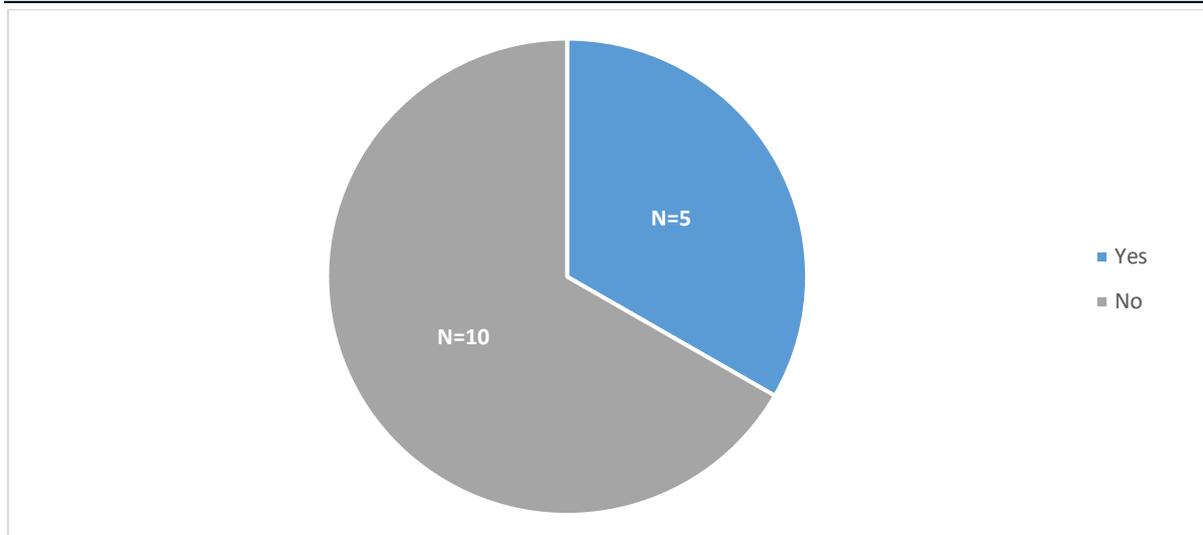
Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Five respondents who use the Q Skills Recording Software noted that they required technical help in order to use the software. When asked to elaborate, respondents noted that this technical help was the initial training provided for the software itself.

Table 11: Respondents' rating on whether the Q Skills Recording Software reduced the time spent recording learners

	Frequency
Yes	N=7
No	N=4
Not Sure	N=4
Total	**N=15**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Almost half of the respondents (N=7) agreed that the Q Skills Software reduced the time spent on assessing learners, whilst the remaining respondents either stated that the software did not reduce time spent recording learners, or that they were not sure. Despite this, all respondents (N=15) agreed that the Q Skills Recording Software allowed teachers to access all the information in one place: additional comments spoke of the usefulness of this.

4.1.3 Progression in Q Skills

Table 12: Respondents' level of agreement with the following statements						
	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Neither**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Not Applicable**
The Q Skills Framework meets the needs of the learners for whom it was created.	N=13	N=18	N=3	N=3	-	N=7
The Q Skills Framework follows on from the Quest Assessment Framework.	N=9	N=17	N=9	N=2	-	N=7
There is clear progression from the Q Skills Framework to the Levels of Progression.	N=18	N=16	N=2	N=1	-	N=7
There is appropriate detail in the descriptors contained in the Q Skills Framework.	N=14	N=10	N=4	N=8	N=1	N=7
The coverage of skills being assessed is sufficiently wide.	N=12	N=20	N=1	N=3	N=1	N=7

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Most respondents (N=31) agreed that the Q Skills Framework meets the needs of the learners for whom it was created. A similar number of respondents (N=26) also agreed that the Q Skills Assessment Framework follows on from the Quest Assessment Framework. In progressing on to the Levels of Progression, 34 respondents agreed that there was appropriate improvement.

A large number of respondents (N=24) agreed that there was appropriate detail contained in the descriptors in the Q Skills. It was also agreed that the coverage of skills is sufficiently wide (N=22). However, a number of qualitative comments suggested the need to include additional examples and detail within the descriptors, detailed below:

- additional, relatable examples for post-16;
- further examples at each level to accommodate learners who will remain at that level; and
- more on fine motor skills.

	Considerable Impact	Moderate Impact	Limited Impact	No Impact	Not Applicable
Table 13: Respondents' ratings on the level of impact of Q Skills across various curricular/scholastic areas					
Teaching and learning of pupils	N=12	N=19	N=3	N=3	N=7
Breadth of curricular experience	N=7	N=22	N=5	N=3	N=7
Learner progress	N=11	N=20	N=2	N=4	N=7

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Respondents agreed the Q Skills had a 'Considerable Impact' or 'Moderate Impact' on the teaching and learning of pupils (N=31), the breadth of curricular experience (N=29) and learner progress (N=31). Qualitative comments indicated that the Q Skills provided a useful method for assessing learners and planning their individual targets (N=6).

Table 14: Respondents' ratings on the Q Skills Recording Software and their ease of use

	Frequency
Strongly Agree	N=10
Agree	N=19
Neither	N=2
Disagree	N=4
Strongly Disagree	N=2
Not Applicable	N=7
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

The majority of respondents (N=29) agreed that the language used in the Q Skills is clear and unambiguous; however, a small number of qualitative responses suggested that the language should be clearer and more concise (N=3).

Table 15: Respondents' levels of agreement on the ease of finding supporting evidence

	Frequency
Strongly Agree	N=11
Agree	N=14
Neither	N=9
Disagree	N=2
Strongly Disagree	N=1
Not Applicable	N=7
Total	**N=44**

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Most respondents (N=25) agreed that they found it straightforward to find supporting evidence; however, a significant minority of respondents either disagreed or were undecided (N=12). Additional qualitative comments noted that the overall process was easy, particularly as recording information was convenient with an iPad (N=3).

**Table 16: Respondents' level of agreement with the following statements**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
Using the Q Skills Framework helped to make reliable and consistent judgements	N=10	N=21	N=3	N=1	N=2	N=7

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
about the progress of learners.						
Using the Q Skills Framework helped to highlight where to make improvements to the teaching and learning of pupils.	N=12	N=21	-	N=1	N=2	N=7
Using the Q Skills Framework was helpful when reporting to parents.	N=13	N=18	N=3	N=1	N=2	N=7
Using the Q Skills Framework helped inform future planning.	N=12	N=21	N=1	N=1	N=2	N=7

Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Respondents rated a number of statements relating to the usefulness of Q Skills; the majority either 'Strongly Agreed' or 'Agreed'. These are as follows:

- Using the Q Skills Framework helped to make reliable and consistent judgements about the progress of learners (N=31).
- Using the Q Skills Framework helped to highlight where to make improvements to the teaching and learning of pupils (N=33).
- Using the Q Skills Framework was helpful when reporting to parents (N=31).
- Using the Q Skills Framework helped to inform future planning (N=33).

Figure 7: Respondents' level of agreement with the following statements
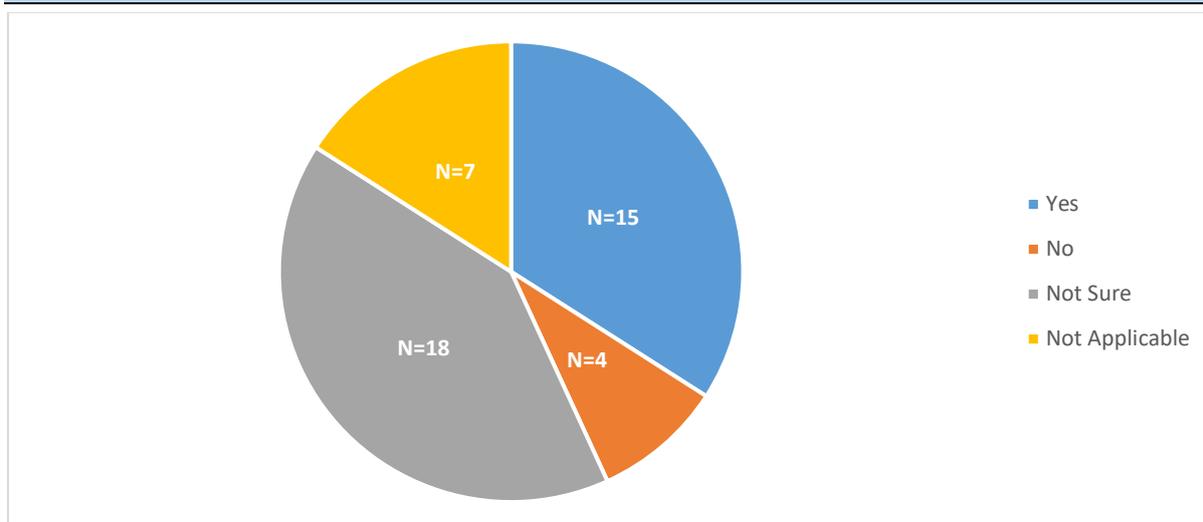
Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

Almost half of those (N=15) who responded to this question agreed that the Q Skills required updating. The main suggestion was that some of the mathematics language should be clearer (N=5).

4.1.4 Professional Development

Figure 8: Respondents' opinion on the need for further professional development
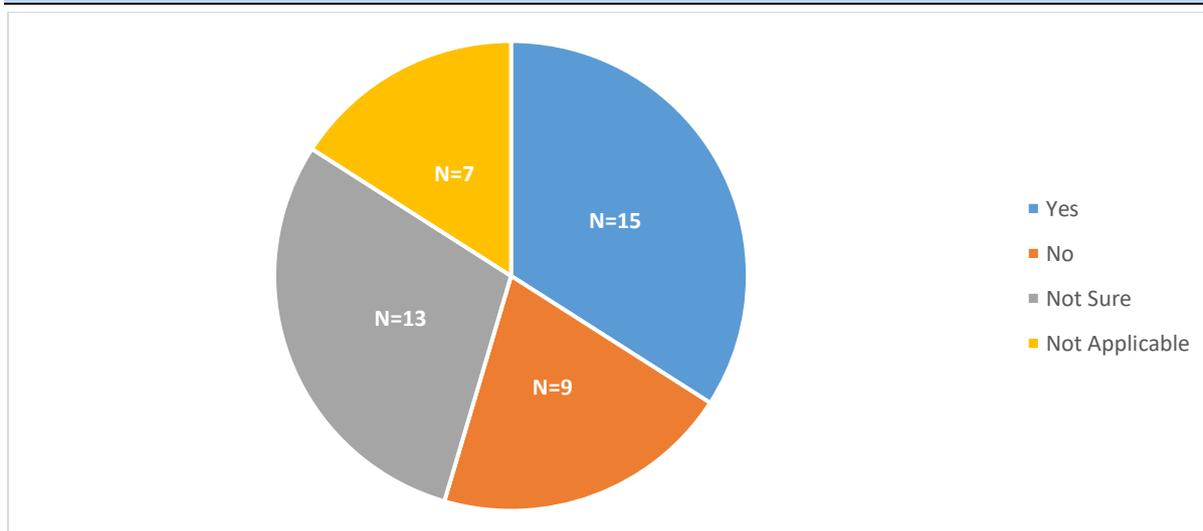
Source: CCEA Q Skills Evaluation Questionnaire Data Output (2020)

The majority of respondents (N=15) agreed that there was a need for further professional development covering the Q Skills Framework, whilst a further 13 respondents were 'Not Sure'. Qualitative comments provided indicated that the following would be useful:

- A refresher course (N=9)
- Training on Recording Software (N=5).

4.2   Focus Groups

This section of the report displays the findings from the focus groups with principals (N=16) and teachers (N=27) regarding the Q Skills. Following on from this are the findings from the focus groups with teachers (N=6) about Quest.[4]

4.2.1 Key Points – Q Skills Focus Groups with Principals and Teachers
Functionality of Q Skills:

- When the Q Skills were introduced, respondents noted that they were a welcome addition for teachers who were teaching pupils with learning disabilities.
- Participants were largely in agreement that the Q Skills provide an education, rich in elements from the curriculum, for learners who are not yet at Level 1 of Levels of Progression.
- Further to this, it was agreed that the Q Skills are a useful tool to track learner progress and build a profile.
- It was noted that, due to the changing population of special schools, some pupils with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) are now being taught at mainstream schools; it was agreed that the Q Skills have been useful for teachers in regard to this.
- Additionally, it was felt that the Q Skills provide the ability to record progression, regression, and spikes in pupils' learning, which provides a more realistic account of SEN learning.
- The Q Skills were also considered to be very useful as a planning tool and are a good reference for classroom activities.
- However, it should be noted that a small number of attendees felt that Level Q 5 was repetitive, while others felt that this was essential to consolidate the skills pupils had learned in previous levels.

Embedding Q Skills in Schools:

- There was a significant difference in the extent to which Q Skills had been embedded into schools. Some schools reported that they were fully committed to using the Q Skills, and have regular input. Some schools noted that they are using the Q Skills once a term, whilst others reported that although they had tried to embed the Q Skills, they lacked the time and commitment from teachers to do so effectively.

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[4] Please note that although the Quest focus group was open to principals, none attended.

- Additionally, it was stated that high turnover has prevented full commitment to the Q Skills, as it is difficult for teachers to develop their knowledge of them if they are not in a long-term post.
- Union action has meant that some teachers are not willing to spend time working on the Q Skills.

Limits of Q Skills:

- It was felt that the jump between some of the levels is too wide, for instance between Levels 4 and 5 in numeracy.
- Furthermore, respondents noted that some learners reach their maximum level and will not progress further. Consequently, it was agreed that the range of skills included in each level is not wide enough to accommodate these learners. The teachers recommended that expanding each level would allow these learners to get an enriched curriculum experience.
- Attendees also criticised the Q Skills for not covering the personal, social and physical development of skills, which are very important milestones for pupils with learning disabilities.
- Teachers discussed the inability to officially record information on a learner who learns to wash their hands independently or control angry outbursts. A future Q Skills which encompasses these skills is necessary to fully represent learners.
- Additionally, respondents believed that there is not enough information available on Q Skills for parents. It was suggested that a short video outlining the purpose of Q Skills would be beneficial.
- Participants also recommended that the language used in the Q Skills should encompass how learners can transfer skills to real-life situations. It was suggested that learners can complete tasks in the classroom: but extending these to real-life situations can be difficult for pupils with learning disabilities.
- A number of attendees stated that some of the examples in the Q Skills are not transferrable for older learners, particularly those aged 16 or older.
- On a more general basis, respondents believed that it would be useful to have a software package that provides teachers with a 'one-stop shop' that would cover all aspects of learners' education, including progress, planning, and providing parents with information.

Cross-Curricular Skills:

- It was agreed that some of the communication statements are not clear in the Q Skills: they can be subjective, so clarification on these is necessary.
- It was felt that Maths and ICT were clear and easy for teachers to follow.
- A number of attendees suggested that the examples and contexts in each level should be broadened.

Alternative Assessment Arrangements:

- The general consensus was that it is difficult to find an assessment structure that suits all learners. For example, it was noted that it could be difficult for teachers to record for learners who have degenerative conditions on most assessment frameworks.

Q Skills Recording Software:

- A number of attendees of the focus groups were not aware of the Q Skills Recording Software.
- Those who used the Q Skills Recording Software noted that it can be difficult in the beginning and may require training for some teachers, which is not always available.
- It was recognised that there is some negativity around the Q Skills Recording Software, particularly among teachers who have unsuccessfully attempted to embed Q Skills into their teaching.
- The software was considered to be very useful as a management tool, providing principals with access to learner records at any time, which can be passed to parents as required.
- It was agreed that the software will only be completely effective if all teachers are maintaining the same standard with their updates.
- For those using the software, it was stated that uploading videos which are longer than 15 seconds can be problematic.
- Overall, it was felt that once teachers have fully embedded the use of the Q Skills Recording Software into their practice, they will notice a decrease in their workload, particularly when writing learners' reports at the end of the year.

Progression for Learners:

- Generally, there is appropriate progression for learners transferring from Quest, and those learners who are transferring to Levels of Progression.

Future Developments in Q Skills:

- The following recommendations were made:

    - provide refresher training for all teachers;
    - increase the breadth of levels within the Q Skills to accommodate learners who have reached their maximum level (a level 4a, 4b and 4c was suggested);
    - include personal and social factors in the Q Skills;
    - include examples and contexts that cater for older learners and relate to their interests
    - it was felt that teenage learners can be offended at having to listen to nursery rhymes; and
    - include skills that are transferrable to real-life situations.

Additional Comments:

- Additional comments reiterated that the Q Skills Framework is a very useful tool for teaching pupils with learning disabilities: it just requires updating.
- It was recommended that any future amendments/updates to the Q Skills should take into account the increase in the population of pupils with learning disabilities, and how they can be adapted to fit the needs of learners.

4.2.2 Key Points − Quest Focus Group with Teachers
Functionality of Quest:

- Overall, it was agreed that Quest provides adequate flexibility for teachers to accommodate the needs of pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and severe medical issues.
- Additionally, Quest was considered to be a useful tool for compiling profiles of learners and drafting Individual Education Plans (IEP).
- It was agreed that the focus of Quest is at an appropriate level for those with PMLD.
- Furthermore, it was noted that Quest can be used in conjunction with Q Skills.

Limitations:

- The overwhelming majority of attendees agreed that it was difficult to allocate time to the curriculum when the basic needs of learners (feeding, changing and taking care of medical needs) take up so much time.
- Although the number of learners in each class is small, they generally stay in that class throughout their time at school, meaning that they encounter the same topic on a number of occasions.
- Much like Q Skills, it was believed that Quest will only work effectively if all teachers maintain the same standard when recording learners' progress.
- The number of staff in each classroom is limited, making it difficult for staff to take a break or leave the classroom.
- Teachers have to be creative when coming up with ideas to keep older learners interested.

Training:

- The teachers had not attended any formal training on Quest and were self-taught; they would welcome any training provided. It was also suggested that a forum for these teachers to meet and discuss ideas would be very beneficial.

Recording Software:

- It was suggested that the Recording software was beneficial when reporting back to parents.
- Some teachers found it difficult to upload videos onto the software.

Progression for Learners:

- Attendees recognised that progression for learners with SLD is not always linear and that their profiles are often spiky, with regression. It was suggested that Quest should allow any regression to be recorded, and the reasons for this.

Alternative Assessment Framework:

- It was agreed that Quest is the best assessment framework available for pupils.

Additional Comments:

- The death of a learner has a significant impact on teachers, with the realisation that teaching the curriculum is not necessarily always the most important element for learners who have SLD.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, respondents were largely positive about the Q Skills, and found them beneficial to teaching learners with SEN. Respondents to the questionnaire maintained that it was easy to use. Further information from the focus groups however suggested that teachers lack time to commit fully to understanding or using the Q Skills. In order to do so, guidance, comprehensive training, and monitoring were suggested to build teacher confidence and competence.

Respondents agreed that the skills contained within the Q Skills sufficiently cover the curriculum and provide opportunities to progress to the Levels of Progression. It was also suggested that more examples should be included to accommodate those learners who have reached Q5. One difference emerged in the data from the focus group and the questionnaire: responses to the questionnaire suggested that the skills outlined for mathematics needed clarification, whilst attendees at the focus group felt that the skills outlined for communication were subjective and required explanation.

Although the number of teachers who used the Q Skills Recording Software was limited, those that fully committed to it had incorporated it into their daily routine, which simplified end-of-year reports and provided up-to-date information when required.

There was agreement that the Q Skills do require updating to bring them into line with changes in society, and with changes to the population of special schools. The main suggestions for updating are as follows:

- include social, emotional and physical aspects of development;
- provide additional examples at each level;
- clarify skills which are unclear; and
- provide age-appropriate examples/context, which would be of interest to learners in post primary.