

Thematic Units (PMLD)

Guidance on delivering a curriculum
through a thematic approach for
learners (aged 3–19) with PMLD



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Introduction

We have developed these thematic units to support you to deliver a vibrant and motivating curriculum for learners aged 3–19 with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). These units are aligned with the Northern Ireland Curriculum. You can use them to enhance the learning experiences of this unique group of learners and deliver all aspects of the curriculum at a level appropriate to your learners' cognitive ability.

To help your learners to make relevant connections, we have integrated the primary and post-primary Areas of Learning into these units. The units help embed information technology, along with communication and assistive technologies, to enrich your learners' experiences.

Considerations

For individuals with PMLD, learning can be idiosyncratic and unpredictable. No two learners progress at the same rate, respond to stimuli in the same way, or begin to understand in a similar recognised pattern of responses and behaviours. Some areas of learning may be relevant to one learner and not to another.

As learners' progress is highly individual, we recommend that you use *Quest for learning* to establish each learner's outcomes and progress. It is important for all staff to use a consistent approach to assessment methods.

When planning for development, you need to consider the complexity of each learner's individual needs. These can include:

- cognitive difficulties;
- physical disabilities;
- sensory impairments;
- medical difficulties including the impact of medications;
- complexity of personal care; and
- potential life threatening and degenerative conditions.

You need to consider these complex conditions when assessing the suitability or viability of proposed teaching strategies and methodology.

You should try to generalise learning at every opportunity. This should avoid repetitive, isolated learning, and ensure that your learners consolidate their skills. Although repetition is essential to learning, you should vary the environments in which learning takes place.

Learning Environment

Creating an effective environment for learning and teaching is a crucial aspect of classroom management. You should consider appropriate learning environments for your learners. These will change as your learners mature. You need to present the curriculum in an age appropriate way, matching experiences and events to your learners' level of development.

The learning environment can affect the development and delivery of quality experiences for your learners. A learning environment where learners can experience and explore the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures of a theme can help to develop and enhance their learning.

Schools have different approaches for grouping their learners. Some have separate provision for learners with PMLD. Others may group learners according to their age or the complexity of their needs.

With this in mind, you may need to adapt the thematic units to meet the diverse needs of your learners. You should use your professional judgement and knowledge of your learners to amend, restructure and adapt these thematic units. This will enable you to deliver a curriculum that, through careful selection, focuses on individual and/or group needs.

Context

Learners with PMLD should have the opportunity to experience first hand a range of activities and events that

aim to engage them in the learning process. A process-based, interactive approach will best support your learners to acquire, practise and establish the early skills of communication and active involvement in everyday experiences. This can be in the classroom, the wider school environments or the local community. These learning experiences should be enjoyable and enhance your learners' opportunities for communication and learning.

Many learners can have difficulty with emotional regulation and may need a transition time at the end of each session before moving onto the next activity. It is therefore a good idea to finish each session with a slower, familiar song. This gives learners time to relax, prepare for transition and integrate the sensory experiences from the session.

Links to Quest for learning

Quest for learning primarily supports pupil-centred assessment and allows you to:

- monitor each learner's understanding and achievements effectively;
- evaluate planning; and
- identify the way forward.

This process of assessment is ongoing and central to ensuring that effective learning and teaching are taking place.

Throughout their educational career and beyond, the progress learners with PMLD can make lies on a broad continuum from a first response to stimuli to exerting autonomy.

Use the milestones in the Assessment Maps in *Quest for learning* to assess the learning outcomes for your learners. *Quest for learning* includes general guidance that provides additional information about many of the techniques and strategies referred to in the thematic units, including:

- the learning environment;
- communication;
- teaching strategies; and
- addressing barriers to learning.

The activities in these thematic units offer learners an opportunity to master and generalise the prerequisite skills for learning. They give learners exciting opportunities to participate in and enjoy the learning process, while using and extending their skills.

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Writers:

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Pack Contents

THEMATIC UNITS

- A Pirate's Life for Me!
- Australia Here We Come!
- Autumn
- Let's All Go on a Summer Holiday
- Magic Carpet Rides
- Our Academy for Witches and Wizards
- Perfect Picnic Fun
- Stepping Back in Time
- The Circus is in Town
- To Infinity and Beyond
- Victorian Historians

GUIDANCE NOTES

MUSIC CD: The CD contains many of the tunes referred to within the Thematic Units.

