

Frequently Asked Questions

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

1. How long will this consultation last?

The consultation began on November 3rd 2015 and will continue until March 31st 2016.

2. Will my written submission be published?

Yes, NCCA plan to publish all written submissions online at the end of the consultation phase. A final consultation report will be published also, to inform participants of the outcomes from the consultation.

3. What is Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB)?

ERB helps pupils to know about and to understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and world views which have been embraced by humankind. It is not focussed on nurturing a belief or practice system of any one religion, instead it focuses on fostering an informed awareness of the main theist, non-theist, and secular beliefs including key aspects of their cultural manifestations. ERB aims to foster a respect, understanding and empathy for members of diverse religions, beliefs and world views.

4. Is Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) the same as Faith Formation or Denominational Religious Education?

ERB is not the same as Faith Formation or Denominational Religious Education; as they involve education as formation in a belief system. Faith formation involves learning how to live a life according to religious guidelines. It also involves learning modes of thinking, values formation, moral action and integration into a faith community in the light of one religious belief. It incorporates the constitutional and legal term 'religious instruction'. ERB on the other-hand calls for teaching about religions and beliefs that connects with the experiences of children and that is objective, pluralist and critical in nature.

5. How does ERB relate to Religious Education?

In English-speaking countries Religious Education often refers to programmes in which pupils learn about different religions and beliefs systems. This usually does not involve faith formation. In this way it is similar to ERB. However, in Ireland, Religious Education can sometimes be understood as Faith Formation or Denominational Religious Education, which involves learning how to live according to particular religious values and as a member of a faith community.

6. What is Ethics Education?

The teaching of ethics includes the formation in and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good. These are all essential to education for citizenship and the proper functioning of democracy. Learning about ethics is important for all but developing modes of ethical behaviour is of central importance to human development.

7. Who is the curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics for?

A curriculum for ERB and Ethics is for all children attending primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

8. Will Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics replace the Patron's programme in schools?

No, the curriculum is not intended to replace the patron's programme. ERB and Ethics is being developed by the state and is separate to, but may complement, such programmes.

9. Will ERB and Ethics affect the time allocated for the Patrons' programmes?

Under the Education Act (1998), a patron is entitled to develop and teach their own programme. They are also entitled to a reasonable amount of time during the school day to teach their programme. The proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics do not call this time into question.

10. Where do the values for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics come from?

The values proposed for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics are rooted in human rights. The pluralist approach, outlined in the consultation paper, builds upon these rights and supports a respect for and recognition of different religions and beliefs. These are values that are underpinned by the Constitution, the 1998 Education Act as well as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

11. Why should there be any reference to religions and beliefs in a publicly funded school system?

The state recognises and respects the expression of religions and beliefs in the public domain. It supports a pluralist approach, underpinned by the Constitution, the Education Act (1998) and the Primary School Curriculum (1999).

12. SPHE and other subjects have similar aims to a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics. Why is this new curriculum needed?

Although there may be aspects of other curriculum areas that support and contribute to the aims of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics. Currently no state curriculum exists, at primary level,

which specifically supports a child's development in the areas of religions, beliefs and ethics. Ireland is quite unique in this regard. A curriculum in ERB and Ethics will ensure that every child has access to structured, coherent and incremental learning in this area, and will ensure the good practices that already take place in schools are recognised and supported.

13. Are children in primary school not too young to be introduced to religious 'facts'?

Children already encounter different religious symbols and language in their everyday lives; in their communities, in their interaction with others, on television shows, in movies as well as in other forms of media. ERB will help children to understand these symbols and language. The NCCA have a good track record in providing curriculum in an age-appropriate manner. Certainly, what is appropriate for the senior classes in primary schools may not be appropriate for junior classes. We have set out possible themes and strands in our consultation document that reflect the development of children in primary schools.

14. What is the relationship between ERB and Ethics?

ERB and Ethics are presented as complementary yet distinct areas of learning. They may both contribute to the development of respect, understanding and empathy towards others in society. However, they are significant areas of study in their own right.

15. Will a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics contribute to curriculum overload?

Teachers have told us that they feel the curriculum is overloaded and that they do not have enough time to teach all of the objectives in the current curriculum. The development of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics, coincides with other changes to the primary curriculum beginning with a new curriculum for Language and Mathematics, and the development of a new Primary Curriculum Framework. A key priority of curriculum revision in these areas, is the need to address, and ultimately to reduce curriculum overload.

As part of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, NCCA are also due to advise the Minister for education and Skills on time allocation across the curriculum in 2016. The developments at primary, including ERB and Ethics, will be considered in this advice.

During the consultation phase we value your all suggestions and feedback of how ERB and Ethics can be incorporated into the curriculum.

16. How is this going to fit in the timetable?

The NCCA understand that time allocation across the curriculum is a concern for schools. We are currently looking at the question of time allocation in the primary curriculum. Different countries, use different models of time allocation. For instance, some countries allocate time on a monthly, termly or even annual basis. NCCA will be considering different approaches and will be advising the Minister in 2016.

17. Can a teacher go from teaching the patron's programme from a faith perspective to teaching ERB from a different perspective?

Although ERB may involve teaching about religions and beliefs, it is not faith formation. It involves creating the space for respectful discussion on areas that are sensitive in nature but matter hugely in people's lives. It is about facilitating the exploration of religions, beliefs and

worldviews of people in our classrooms, schools and communities in a child-centred way. Teachers already facilitate respectful discussions on sensitive areas in their classrooms on a daily basis and are used to teaching using different approaches depending on the needs of the class or the lesson.