

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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Yes

No

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

Please outline your overall response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

I think that the new curriculum empowers us as student teachers as it provides us with the opportunity to use our agency to facilitate the individual needs of every child in our classroom. The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework emphasises the importance of flexibility, inclusion and integration are also fundamental for this to happen. This is evident within the attention that is placed on broader learning outcomes and more flexible time allocations. However I was apprehensive upon scrutinizing certain aspects of the curriculum, especially when considering the challenges children are being faced with in a technologically advancing, pluralising and diversifying society. This is something which I will further elaborate on within my response.

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The vision of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines that the curriculum aims to ‘provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish’, which in order to be achieved, will involve teachers working inclusively, as agentic professionals (NCCA, 2020).

I feel that the emphasis placed on teacher’s agency and professionalism when enacting the curriculum is fundamental to its inclusive and diverse delivery in an increasingly pluralising and globalising society. This is evident from the 2016 census figures that show the number of ‘mixed Irish and non-Irish households’ have increased by 14.7% since April 2011, standing at 134,838 (CSO, 2016).

I also feel that it is important for the consideration of differentiation and inclusion, in catering for individual differences of pupils in every classroom. I feel it is not flexible in the sense that representation within the curriculum overall is not planned for directly, and depends more so on the agency and professionalism of the teacher rather than what the curriculum outlines in terms of this. The agency of the teacher is important as it allows the teacher to identify and understand the needs of each child in their class, however, I feel that clearer guidelines and a strategic plan would aid the representation of minority groups in the classroom more effectively. I fear that representation will not be equal across the system because of this lack of emphasis. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is mentioned within the Draft Framework, however I feel that a clearer, more conducive explanation of how this will be implemented specifically within the Framework would be of significant benefit to teachers implementing equality, their own agency and flexibility for all learners within the classroom (NCCA, 2020).

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Provide a clear vision for children’s learning across the eight years of primary school.
- Link with learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connect with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.
- Support educational transitions by connecting with what and how children learn at home, in preschool and post-primary school.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

There is substantial evidence in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework of linkage to Aistear and to the Framework for Junior Cycle. This provides coherence across the education system and optimal support for students when transitioning between these stages of education. The continuation of emphasis being placed on partnerships and relationships in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework, draws from the principles of relationships, parents, family and community and the adults role (NCCA, 2009). I noted a similar continuation from Aistear within the learning environments principle (NCCA, 2020). One of the key messages of the Framework for Junior Cycle is having a ‘flexible programme for student learning’, something that we see is being prioritised within the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). It also makes reference to ‘a broader picture of learning’ and ‘collaboration between teachers’, the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework mirroring this in its efforts to place a more significant emphasis on integration and cross-curricular teaching within broader strands, rather than specific subjects, in the early years of primary school (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Within the Framework for Junior Cycle I noticed that it outlines how students might

engage in ‘other learning experiences’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). I felt that this was lacking in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. Reference made to this in the Primary Framework would support its aim of supporting every child to thrive through other learning experiences such as performance, competitions and fairs, and access to services such as student support would bolster the child’s opportunities to flourish.

Emerging priorities for children’s learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Embed seven key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.
- Focus on developing children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies are broad in nature to describe this wider understanding of learning.
- Have increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning, and have new aspects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children’s learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework includes seven key competencies that aim to develop children’s skills, knowledge, concepts, dispositions, attitudes and values in order to help them in dealing with a variety of challenges, situations and contexts. I agree that the seven key competencies all deserve a level of merit and are correct in being considered fundamental competencies that serve this purpose of supporting children’s cognitive,

affective and physical development. These key competencies are crucial for the child's ability to understand and succeed when engaging with the curriculum, and provide a foundational basis for what they will encounter at secondary level. I feel that the key competencies can all be integrated well between the various strands of the curriculum. However, I feel that challenges may be presented within the key competencies of 'being a digital learner' and 'fostering wellbeing'. The proper implementation of digital learning is challenged by the fact that 'there is a huge gap in the rhetoric of ICT in schools and the practice of ICT in schools' (Marcus-Quinn, Hourigan & McCoy, 2019, p768). I feel that schools that lack sufficient funding, and possibly small rural schools in particular, are at a significant disadvantage here, as schools that do not have access to sufficient resources cannot facilitate digital literacy.

I feel that fostering wellbeing effectively would be another challenge, as there is a current lack of support and guidance for educators. I feel that clearer guidelines are necessary considering the new time allocation for, and the distinction of wellbeing as a stand-alone competency. I consider wellbeing to be of a higher importance than the other competencies and that it has been overlooked in curriculum up to this point. There is useful documentation available, for example the 'Well-Being in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion' (HSE, DES, Dept. of Health, NEPS, 2015) report, however there is a considerable gap between this research and its implementation.

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be broad and balanced in purpose and content.
- Be structured in five broad curriculum areas;
 - Language
 - Mathematics, Science and Technology Education

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- Wellbeing
- Social and Environmental Education
- Arts Education.

(In addition to the five areas above, the Patron’s Programme is developed by a school’s patron with the aim of contributing to the child’s holistic development particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective and in the process, underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. These areas connect to the themes of *Aistear* and to the subject-based work in Junior Cycle.)

- Provide for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 (junior Infants – second Class) and more subject-based learning in Stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class).
- Use broad learning outcomes to describe the expected learning and development for children.
- Incorporate the new *Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

I think that the introduction of five broad curriculum areas that develop into the retained subjects from the 1999 curriculum is a positive change going forward. As teachers, this would provide an abundance of opportunities for implementing integration and linkage between these areas. Whichever model of integrated curriculum is chosen, it should reflect a philosophical, pedagogical and coherent position on the “how” as well as the “what” to be learned; simply calling a curriculum integrated does not make it so (Bacon, 2018, p. 12).

I believe that the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework reflects an adequately coherent philosophical and pedagogical position in this respect. For the children, it is more beneficial for them to make connections between learning in different subjects in achieving a well-rounded education (Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 16). Integration is not a new

found concept at primary level as the Aistear framework also features this methodology.

This proves an important element of the curriculum at all levels as ‘for the young child, the distinctions between subjects are not relevant: what is more important is that he or she experiences a coherent learning process that accommodates a variety of elements

(Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 16).

Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Promote high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Conceptualise assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning.
- Highlight the importance of teachers’ professional judgement in supporting progression in children’s learning.
- Encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children’s interests and experiences.
- Recognise the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children’s learning.
- Recognise the role and influence of parents and families in children’s education.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

I agree that assessment and progression should be prioritised as a key principle as it is essential in supporting children’s learning across the curriculum. Traditionally, assessment has been viewed as a method solely for recording student achievement, however the draft framework moves away from this ideology, leaning towards a more holistic, pedagogical interpretation of assessment (Lysaght et al., 2019). I think that the three key messages within the draft framework that underpin assessment are comprehensive and progressive,

and clearly present as an integral part of teaching and learning, existing along a continuum (NCCA, 2020). Assessment within the draft framework provides ample opportunity for the teacher to understand the differing needs of each child within their classroom in order to pitch their lessons appropriately. Children who present with differing abilities and needs can be provided with more individual support that is curated for their specific needs by external stakeholders, for example, NEPS. I think that we can implement this principle through scaffolding children's learning, only utilising standardised assessment when relevant (NCCA, 2020, p. 23).

Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities.

The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

- Enhanced enjoyment of learning for children.
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children's learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to

challenges and changing needs and priorities. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

I think that the new Primary Draft Curriculum builds on the strengths of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum in many ways, notably by building on teaching methodologies such as integration and assessment. The addition of new time allocations should help in terms of reducing curriculum overload and allowing for more flexibility. The principles and key competencies of the new curriculum also interlink with that of *Aistear* and the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, providing clear transitions and fluency between pre-school, primary school and secondary school.

Physical education presents as part of wellbeing within the early years of the draft framework. I found this to be problematic and questioned the relevance and clear connection between these two subject areas within the draft framework. Why should P.E. present as a more relevant tie to wellbeing than other curricular areas, particularly the arts subjects of music, art and drama? I feel this is especially relevant when considering that ‘in recent years there has been a growing interest in employing arts therapists as specialists who can address young people’s emotional needs and ultimately support their learning’ (Karkou & Glasman, 2004, p.57).

I believe specific guidance and prioritisation regarding LGBTQ+ and anti-racist education would be a useful and significant asset within the new Primary Curriculum, considering the changing needs and priorities of children in Ireland today. While I feel that there are good intentions relating to these topics within the curriculum, they are too broad to have a

significant impact in the classroom, and depend more so on the onus of the teacher rather than the guidance of the curriculum.

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Thank you for your submission.

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