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

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
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Organisation submission details

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Date	5 January 2021
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Yes [x]   No [ ]

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

BeLonG To Youth Services is the national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) young people in Ireland. Since 2003, we have worked with LGBTI+ young people, aged between 14 and 23 years, to create a world where they are equal, safe, and valued in the diversity of their identities and experiences. We also advocate and campaign on behalf of young LGBTI+ people and offer a specialised LGBTI+ youth service with a focus on mental and sexual health, alongside drug and alcohol support. We respond to the needs of LGBTI+ young people in Ireland and we help them thrive. For over a decade, with the support of the Department of Education and our Education partners we have provided training, resources and materials to post primary schools across Ireland to address homophobic and transphobic bullying. We have also developed Safe and Supportive Schools, a whole school community programme to support schools to become inclusive places for young people to learn. This year 20 schools will undertake this programme with us.

In 2016, BeLonG To and St Patrick's College, DCU, with the support of the DES, published the results of a pilot aimed at supporting primary schools to address homophobic and transphobic bullying. Based on the research undertaken and following on advice from the project advisory group, it was decided that the best approach would be to develop Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) classroom materials for 5th and 6th Classes. The lessons, including information for teachers, pupil worksheets etc, were piloted from January – March 2016 in schools in Dublin, Wexford and Donegal. The lessons were revised based on teacher feedback and are available to provide an interesting and structured way to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. The resource is available here: All_Together_Now_Educational_Resource.pdf (belongto.org)

BelonGTo welcomes the opportunity to feedback on the draft primary curriculum document, and we would be happy to consider any future opportunities for more in-depth discussion on any of the points outlined below.

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.

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Section 1

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

- The draft primary curriculum framework offers an opportunity to ensure that children today are free from old prejudices and bias in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, free from shame and stigma and resulting damage to wellbeing. According to the LGBT Ireland Report (2016) children commonly realise they are LGBTI+ aged 12 and younger. For children to thrive, they need to see their experiences and lives reflected in curriculum, at both the intended, policy level and at the realised level, in individual classrooms.
- It is wonderful to see space for diversity and integration (D&I) in the draft primary curriculum framework. As well as specific focus, D&I can be threaded throughout curriculum, e.g. visibility of different types of families when they are being discussed, LGBT characters being included in stories, maths examples etc
- It is important to account for teachers' own unconscious bias (we all have them), so initial teacher training on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) is very important. In this regard, it is very heartening to see interconnected elements of inclusive education and global citizenship education included as core in the new CEIM standards from the Teaching Council. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that ITE is resourced and supported to realise the promise of these new standards. Additionally, in-career teachers need to be supported to build their capacity to raise and deal with sexual orientation and gender identity in curriculum relevant contexts. The research has shown us that there is a need for ITE/CPD around sexual orientation and gender identity to ensure that schools are best placed to make informed decisions about the flexible time element proposed in the framework. The NCCA is proposing that teachers are agentic professionals, who are best placed to decide how at least some of the time gets used. ITE/CPD on the issues of SOGI would mean that these issues could be to the fore in discussions around flexible time.
- Fake news and cancel culture are an unfortunate reality in today's world. As we have seen in the U.S. and U.K. this has led to great divides and a growing polarisation of society, a rise in hate crime and hate speech online and offline. Tomorrow's children need the skills, capacity and confidence to be able to recognise and understand all this and to be able to listen to opposing views and perspectives discuss, respect and acknowledge differences of opinion, co-exist peacefully, resist manipulation and radicalisation, stand up for their beliefs, understand power and their own power.

We know from International research, national research[1] and best practice that in order for LGBTI+ students to feel welcome and included, thereby reducing mental health and wellbeing risks such as increased rates of suicide and self-harm amongst LGBTI+ students, schools need support to:

(1) Develop and implement effective school LGBTI+ inclusion policies and plans.
- (2) Implement a curriculum that supports diversity and respect for LGBTI+ people.

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[1] : Barron, M. and O'Hagan, L. (2019) LGBTI+ Safe and Supportive Schools. 2nd Ed. Dublin: HSE, BeLonG To Youth Services.

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- (3) Ensure that staff are LGBTI+ aware and equipped to address LGBTI+ issues and support vulnerable students.
- (4) Provide direct supports to LGBTI+ young people through the appropriate school structures including responding appropriately and supportively when an LGBTI+ young person comes out.
- (5) Signpost LGBTI+ young people as appropriate to outside agencies and supports.
- (6) Work with the community outside the school gates, including any local LGBTI+ youth projects/groups, parents and community organisations to promote a wider LGBTI+ inclusive community

It is therefore a public health imperative that the new primary curriculum framework supports diversity and respect for LGBTI+ people.

"*School was incredibly uncomfortable and often I feared for my safety. This led to me not attending school for more days than I've ever missed previously which in turn had an immense adverse effects on my grades and prevented me from being able to put my full attention on the Leaving Certificate*." Quote from a young person who replied to the School Climate survey, 2019

"*A lot of students in my all-girl secondary school were very unsupportive and talked about me behind my back and spread rumours around school and secretly taking pictures of me and posting them on social media.*" Quote from a young person who replied to the School Climate Survey, 2019

"*I have been scared to come out as trans in my school for three years. They barely accept gay people and I've never heard of a single out trans girl in my town. Also, I can't be myself at home because I would be stabbed in X town for being trans. I just can't wait to get to college.*" Quote from a young person who replied to The School Climate Survey, 2019

"*I was physically and verbally harassed while I was in school based on my sexual orientation and because I was more masculine than other girls. I got yelled at by one student who used dyke and lesbian in a negative way towards me, then repeatedly punched and kicked me while other students watched this happened on two occasions.*" Quote from a young person who replied to The School Climate Survey, 2019

"*School was incredibly uncomfortable and often I feared for my safety. This led to me not attending school for more days than I've ever missed previously which in turn had an immense adverse effects on my grades and prevented me from being able to put my full attention on the Leaving Certificate.*" Quote from a young person who replied to The School Climate Report, 2019

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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.

Being for every child, includes LGBTI+ children and those with LGBTI+ parents and family members. We know from research and our work with LGBTI+ children since 2003 that it is important for their well-being and sense of belonging in school to see their lives and experiences reflected in schools and in curriculum. No visibility creates a sense of stigma and shame by 'Othering' invisible people and experiences excluded from the classroom. Schools that take the steps outlined in section one above to ensure that LGBTI+ students experience real inclusion, significantly decrease the risk of bullying, exclusion, isolation, fear of rejection, mental health problems, missing school, early school leaving amongst this group of children. [2]

Agency and flexibility empower teachers and schools to devote more time when needed to address issues such as homophobic and transphobic bullying incidents or when a student 'comes out' in school, ensuring they feel welcome and included. It should not be seen as an excuse for schools to skip addressing issues like this head-on or ignoring their obligations under the National Action Plan on Bullying, 2013 to create a positive school culture and climate that is welcoming of

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[2] Pizmony-Levy, O. (2019). The 2019 Irish National School Climate Survey Report. Research Report. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.

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difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity and respect (National Action Plan on Bullying, 2013 & Anti Bullying Guidelines for Primary and Post-Primary schools, 2013, circular 045/2013).

Young people want to learn about LGBTI+ issues in school. They understand how important that is for their own well-being and for reducing stigma a prejudice.

"It was difficult for me to not feel like an outsider. I was afraid to get changed in the changing rooms for PE out of fear of rumours or dirty looks and was almost glad when PE was stopped in my Leaving Cert year. Being an LGBTI+ youth isn't just about coming out, it's about not being included in health and well-being classes, not being given advice during sexual health classes, having fears every time you meet someone new in school." Quote from a young person who replied to The School Climate Survey, 2019

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.

- Research has shown us that 12 is the most common age in Ireland for young people to realise that they may be LGBTI+, however we know from supporting children and parents since 2003 that this realisation can happen when children are much younger[3]. These

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[3] BeLonG To Youth Services, HSE, National Office of Suicide Prevention, Trinity College Dublin, GLEN. (2016). LGBTIreland Report. Dublin

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findings support the need for visibility of LGBTI+ lives and experiences in order for all students to know they are respected, welcome and safe in school. It means we need to start these conversations about SOGI in primary school. Young people themselves have expressed that it is too late to address bias, prejudice at post-primary level, as stigma and shame have already set in by then[4]. Unfortunately, even in today's post -marriage equality Ireland, homophobic language and bullying are still widespread in post-primary schools. Young people have told us, and the evidence shows us that we need to start this work in primary schools. In this regards I would refer again to the findings of the research team in St Patrick's College, DCU in the 2016 report AllToghether Now. Report-AllTogetherNow-PilotProject-PDF.pdf (belongto.org)[5]

- "*My (primary) school has a serious bullying problem that they did nothing about even though they had addressed many times that they didn't tolerate bullying*" Quote from a student in post-primary school from The School Climate Report, 2019.

- For more details of what post primary students in Ireland say on this matter see School Climate Report, 2019) key findings. For example: 73% of LGBTI+ students felt unsafe at school. 47% because of their sexual orientation and 27% because of their gender expression. This report found that 3 in 10 LGBTI+ students missed at least one day in the previous month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable. 38% of LGBTI+ students were physically harassed (e.g., being shoved or pushed), 25% because of their sexual orientation and 18% based on gender expression. 11% of LGBTI+ students were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked or injured with a weapon) because of their sexual orientation, 8% because of their gender expression. 43% of LGBTI+ students were sexually harassed (eg unwanted touching or sexual remarks).

- Transitioning socially in school – schools need support to have policies in place for the practicalities of transgender students e.g. change of name and pronouns, uniforms and bathrooms. They also need training and resources for teachers and students to help ensure trans students are supported and feel welcome. Visibility across the curriculum is imperative, with a special focus in Wellbeing, Social and Environmental Education and the corresponding curriculum areas/subjects at stage 2.

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[4] Pizmony-Levy, O. (2019). The 2019 Irish National School Climate Survey Report. Research Report. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
[5] B Collins, S Keating, Professor M Morgan (2016) All Together Now! Pilot Project on Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying In Primary Schools

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- Children need to learn about human rights, equality, diversity and inclusion and how to stand up against injustice in primary school. It is too late to wait until post-primary for this learning as prejudiced and biased language and behaviour has already influenced their lives and in some cases their attitudes and behaviour.

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.

- Digital Learning, creativity and wellbeing are increasingly important competencies as today's children need even greater capacity for critical thinking as well as greater understanding and value for the wellbeing of themselves, their community, the planet. Fake news, widening polarisation of viewpoints across society, far-right global movements, 'cancel culture,' allowing no room for discussion or respectful conversation and learning, disenfranchisement with political and democratic processes, are all part of the current national and global context. The emerging priorities part of the framework allows for flexibility to teach learners the skills they need to negotiate a fast-changing world.

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- More than ever, this generation needs to understand (a) how information online and offline is produced / re-produced, (b) how and why power & power-structures are created and maintained for certain groups of people (c) bias (including unconscious bias), prejudice, patriarchy, misogyny, racism, classism, homophobia, ableism and other ways power structures and ideals can negatively impact individuals and communities.
- 'Being an Active Citizen' as a key competency enables space and time for celebration and fostering respect for difference, multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, equality, human rights in the context of our global village, global economy, global workforce, global information, media, communication and tech platforms/apps.
- Wellbeing as a competency creates space for the curriculum to include exploration about difference, acceptance, celebration of same, including understanding that we all have a sexual orientation and a gender identity and that not everyone's in the same. Not only is that ok, but in order for us to be well and to thrive we must be proud of who we are and we must support our friends and family members who may be different to us and who may find acceptance or even self-acceptance more difficult because of stigma and prejudice.
- Not all this can be taught in primary school – however the competencies, skills and focus will prepare children for lifelong learning and for really understanding what is going on in the world around them and that they have the power and agency to make progressive change.

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
    - 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

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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.

- The overall feedback from BelongTo in relation to this message is positive. As mentioned above, our research shows that there is a need for specific focus on SOGI somewhere in these 5 broad curriculum areas. This could be in Wellbeing and/or in Social and Environmental Education. However. There also needs to be visibility of LGBTI+ lives and experiences across all 5 curriculum areas.
- In relation to the patron's programme, BelongTo have a concern insofar as this should not overshadow, or take away time for wider learning or even worse give schools an excuse not to cover SOGI issues and tackle homophobia and transphobia in schools.
- "*All young people must be treated with compassion and be helped to understand that they are loved by God and their inherent human dignity is valued and respected. The prevalence of sexual bullying and ostracisation can so easily leave them susceptible to feelings of rejection, distress, self-harm and risk-taking behaviours. This cannot be tolerated in any school, never mind a Catholic school which holds, as a core value, the dignity of every human person.*" Extract from Keynote address by Archbishop Eamon Martin to JMB/AMCSS 31st Annual Conference Galway, 3 May 2018.
- Is 'broad learning outcomes' so loose that it would be challenging for an inspector to say a school did not comply? Experience of recent junior cycle reform shows that the education system needs long-term investment in terms of teacher capacity to translate broad learning outcomes into learning intentions/success criteria. BelongTo suggests that professional

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development, together with the exemplification of how broad learning outcomes should be utilised in everyday classroom contexts is a necessary support for teachers. Further, we believe that exemplification should model good practice in embedding teaching, learning and assessment of topics such as sexual orientation, gender identity and broader diversity and inclusion related topics.

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.**

This is an important key message and builds on what we have called for above in relation to the importance of initial teacher training as well as CPD for teachers on SOGI and Homophobic/transphobic bullying. As mentioned before, we all have unconscious bias, teachers need to be supported and given the time to understand their bias in order to understand impact of stigma, prejudice on LGBTI+ students. We would refer again to the key findings from School Climate Report, 2019. When staff members intervened in homophobic remarks, LGBTI+ students were:

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- 5% more likely to feel accepted by the student body (28% vs. 33%)

- 15% more likely to feel that they belong in their school (47% vs 32%).

- 8% less likely to miss days of school due to feeling unsafe (31% vs 39%).

The effect of allyship or support from teachers is hugely valuable. Students who reported a higher level of staff who support LGBTI+ students were:

- 45% more likely to feel accepted by the student body (64% vs 19%).

- 34% more likely to feel that they belong in their school (57% vs 23%).

- 20% less likely to miss days of school due to feeling unsafe (24% vs 44%).

"My school guidance councillors principal and deputy principal where very supportive when I was going through tough times. The guidance councillor even came to visit me in a psychiatric hospital after an extremely bad depressive episode I had." Quote from a young person who replied to The School Climate Survey, 2019

"I am very grateful for one of my teachers. He is also gay and I feel like having him there is really comforting and I can go to him for anything I need." Quote from a young person who replied to The School Climate Survey, 2019

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.

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- 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.

Based on BeLonG To's process of piloting Altogether Now, primary lessons as mentioned above, and the teachers who took part in same, there was feedback in relation to the SPHE time related challenges of teaching about the LGBTI+ issues.

When teachers were asked about possible difficulties that schools and teachers might experience in implementing the Altogether Now programme in primary schools, respondents thought that a potential difficulty was finding the time, given the demands on teachers with new programmes and initiatives. As one said: ' … the problem is simply one of TIME'.

This data highlights the importance of the extra time allocation for SPHE in the proposed primary framework. The more time and status for SPHE in primary can only help in terms of ensuring LGBTI+ young people feel like they belong at primary level and in addressing anti-LGBTI+ stigma, prejudice and violence in our schools and our communities.

Data Protection

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with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.

Thank you for your submission.

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