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 Seamus O'Neill	Navan, Co Meath
Date 26th October 2021	
E-mail sandboneill@gmail.com	

Organisation submission details

Name	
Position	
Organisation	
Date	
E-mail	

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Yes | Yes

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

I am not part of any organisation. I am a former primary teacher, former PDST trainer (Scratch, Maths and Gaeilge) and former volunteer educational service provider with Navan Education Centre for over 40 years. I am familiar with the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* having taken guidance from it while completing an assignment for **St. Nicholas Montessori College of Ireland** during the Summer of 2020. The college asked me to develop teaching modules in *Maths, Numeracy* and *Technology* for their new B. Ed Primary course for initial teacher education.

My interest in Scratch goes back to 2011, when I founded a Coder Dojo in Navan Education Centre. Since then, I have mentored children and I have also taught Scratch in schools in Ireland and UK and have organised 3 National SCRATCH Conferences. As co-author of a popular Maths textbook (for CJ Fallon) and with a long association with technology in education (children's Coding and Computational Thinking in particular) I have been keen to link Scratch with Maths. This has fuelled my personal educational research in Scratch. I became curiously interested in the *ScratchMaths* research project by professors *Richard Noss* and *Celia Hoyles* of University College London (2014). Their project was heavily funded, and eventually I could find no outcome to match my own Scratch research. Scratch originator, Mitch Resnik, and his development team have met me in person and on Zoom and we have come to know each other. They have just released the **Scratch Strategic Plan** and it is worth us knowing. My greatest sense of achievement was when the Media Lab at MIT (Boston) sought my permission to add my graphical vector grids into the Scratch backdrops library. I created the backdrops to improve Scratch as a support medium for Maths teaching and learning for primary and up to Junior Cycle for teachers and students. Much of it is shared on my web site.

At the onset of Covid-19, and to make this submission to the NCCA, I decided to summarise my years of association with Scratch in a project which I called, *Scratch for Your Kids* **(with toolkit resources for Code Clubs and Schools).** While developing it, I shared it for feedback on relevant Facebook Groups, one of which is *Teaching with Scratch* (administered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education) where I have hundreds of followers. Last week I completed the project after 20 months of lockdown and it can be seen and downloaded in Flip Book format at **https://readysteadycode.ie** . I believe I my developed ideas are worth some attention. They are a unique contribution to the Irish Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment for Maths, Coding and Computational Thinking (I am working on a Toolkit of resources, with some already shared).

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.*

- COMPLEXITY: There is sound rationale for the *DPCF* as covered in its detail and ambitions. The 1999 Revised Curriculum took over a year to complete with input from so many organisations. Despite all the delay during the 90s, it was easier to build on the 1971 curriculum when there was much less ethnic, cultural, and social diversity and technology was not the factor then that it is now (for better and for worse).

- URGENCY: The challenges from Ireland's diversity, changing needs and new challenges and technology advances make curriculum reform necessary and urgent.

- PROGRESSION: Back in 1999, the New Revised Primary curriculum did not have an *Aistear* equivalent programme sandwiched in between a Junior Cycle (and CS at Senior level). In my experience as teacher and parent, there was very little about transitions, continuity, and progression. The dreaded Entrance tests were seldom part of communication between local primary and secondary schools and took place so early in the year. They suited the secondary system but had a hugely negative effect at primary 6th class on pupils, parents, and on conscientious teachers.

- CURRICULUM AREAS and SUBJECT INTEGRATION: The 5 broad curriculum area at Infant and Junior level moving to a new integrated subject based approach at Middle and Senior standards circumvents problems of overload and time allocation

- IMPLEMENTATION: A big issue with the introduction of the 1999 curriculum was CPD (which ran for several years via the Education Support Centres, with staff INSET-day closures and at great cost). How successful was it? Initial teacher training would take years to bring about change. CPD via online conferencing is less costly and better for the environment, but is it effective? What's the plan to upskill the teachers?

- DIGITAL and MATHEMATICAL: Five years ago, there was a huge push to have every child learn coding. I saw it as a non-starter because it was not driven by education nor was it possible for teachers who are unskilled in that area to deliver it. I saw SCRATCH as the way, using coding as a support in learning Maths. The *Creative Ireland Programme* (2017 – 2022) is an example of *aspirational* thinking. It has one year left and it has not achieved its aim to build the 4 pillars of Music, Drama, Art, and Coding for all children. It's a lesson!

- WELL DONE! Overall, a lot of research, networking and consultation has gone into the *DPCF* and I commend the NCCA for what it contains. I have followed its development and kept in touch with developments via the NCCA online. The pandemic has intervened to stretch the timeline to the eventual launch of the new curriculum.

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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.

- I'm in total agreement with all of these. Where could one have a problem?
- The *DPCF* speaks of 'agentic' teachers who are "reflective, competent and capable of exercising professional judgement in response to individual learning needs in a variety of contexts." These are the professionals who will have to deliver the change.
- The DES and its inspectorate will need to play a positive role in a spirit of agency and flexibility. I have high expectations that it will be the case.
- Although it is a new term to me, I believe I was 'agentic' within the framework and limits of the 1972 and 1999 curricula as a primary teacher for over 30 years and since.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

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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.

- (Entrance Exams of the past are mentioned in my intro above).
- I'm glad to read about *Mo* Scéal the concept of the *Education Passport.*
- Sharing information about children's learning and development is true of the year-by-year transition between classes. Sometimes teachers don't see eye-to-eye and, consequently the children lose out due to lack of communication and continuity.
- As a former teacher, parent, and currently a grandparent (of primary grandchildren in Ireland and UK) who home-schooled during Covid-19, I am acutely aware of teaching methods and home-assignments that fall short of the high aspirations in the *DPCF.*

- **HOMEWORK**: Schools need to evaluate the *why?* and *what?* of homework. It is a bone of contention which needs to be addressed. The variety of software that is used between home and school should be evaluated.

- **SCHOOL REPORTS:** The system of Parent-teacher Meetings is often fraught with problems. In relation to School Reports, teachers often just tick boxes (where they should make a constructive comment). Staff in our school developed a 'Lexicon' of phrases, terms, synonyms, and euphemisms to help teachers write honest and constructive reports. There may be an app that is used for that purpose now.
- **After all the above, teachers already feel snowed under by the accumulating amount of paperwork required of them to complete.**

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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.

- From my perspective, if I were to pick 4 of the seven, the ones that stand out for me are, being *Creative, Digital, Mathematical* and *Learning to be an Active Learner*. The other three are just as important (*Wellbeing* may be even more important).
- The competencies are key challenges for ongoing CPD and especially for teachers during their initial teacher training. As teachers are expected to inculcate the Key Competencies into their pupils, they need to work on these competencies in a personal way in themselves.
- The 7 Key Competencies are foundational and pivotal to the success of the new curriculum roll-out.

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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 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 5 curriculum areas at Junior level, moving to a new integrated subject based approach at Middle and Senior standards circumvents problems of overload and time allocation.
- A *Foreign Languages Project* ran for several years out of Kildare Education Support Centre. It focussed on European languages in the EU as then constituted. What was taken from it?
- A question hangs over which languages will be taught under the new curriculum, and who will teach them?

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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.

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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.

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Covid-19

> **Since the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, Covid-19 has presented a big challenge for schools. Please give your views on the implications of schools' experience of the pandemic for the finalisation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.**
>
> - Apart from delaying the Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment process, will face-to-face training be less common?
> - On-line seminars and conferences are more cost-effective, they reduce travel, and they are carbon neutral. But will on-line CPD be sufficient to upskill teachers in the challenges and changes that are envisioned in the new approach?
> - Will Zoom-fatigue set in?

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

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