



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

Consultation report on the draft specification for Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

June 2024

Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
SECTION ONE: CONSULTATION PROCESS.....	2
Methodological approach	2
Consultation responses	3
Promoting the consultation	4
SECTION TWO: CONSULTATION FINDINGS.....	5
Overarching feedback	5
Should senior cycle SPHE be mandatory?	6
Senior cycle SPHE as a part of the LCA programme.....	7
Aim and rationale	7
Cross-cutting elements and learning outcomes	8
Assessment.....	12
SECTION THREE: OTHER AREAS OF FEEDBACK	14
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS.....	15
APPENDIX A: ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED AT CONSULTATION EVENT	16
APPENDIX B: ORGANISATIONS THAT SUBMITTED WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS	17
APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUALS WHO SUBMITTED WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS AND WISHED TO BE LISTED	19

Introduction

The Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Primary and Post-primary School (2019) highlighted the need to update the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum. It specifically identified the importance of grounding curriculum redevelopments in an approach that is student-centred, holistic, inclusive, and age- and developmentally-appropriate.

The curriculum redevelopment work began with Junior Cycle SPHE and in September 2023, schools introduced an updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification.

A draft Senior Cycle SPHE specification was published for public consultation on July 12th 2023 and the consultation ran until November 3rd 2023. The specification is designed for 60 hours of learning in SPHE to be accessed by all students in the final two years of senior cycle programmes.

A redeveloped curriculum for Senior Cycle SPHE is designed to support students in further developing the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values to become healthy, responsible and caring young adults and support them as they navigate the experiences of life now and beyond school.

This report on the consultation presents an overview of the consultation process, followed by a summary of the feedback received, and an account of how this has informed the work in finalising the Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum.

Section One: Consultation process

Consultation is a key aspect of NCCA's work where advice is shaped by feedback from schools, education partners, wider stakeholders and the general public. This section presents an overview of the methodological approach employed during this consultation. Although consultation, unlike research, has a policy and practice rather than a theoretical focus, the methodological approach outlined in this section, is underpinned by the principles set out in NCCA's Research Strategy (2023). The following section outlines the approach taken and provides a summary of engagement during the consultation.

Methodological approach

The consultation on the draft Senior Cycle SPHE specification included multiple modes of engagement during the sixteen-week consultation process:

- Online surveys
- Written submissions
- Parent focus groups
- Teacher focus groups
- Student focus groups
- A focus group with school leaders
- A focus group with Department of Education SPHE inspectors
- A focus group with the Executive of the Irish Second-Level Students Union (ISSU)
- A stakeholder consultation event with agencies and organisations who work directly in SPHE or have expertise in a particular aspect relevant to SPHE.

A self-selecting sampling approach was used for the online survey, written submissions and focus group sessions. An open call inviting expressions of interest to support the student voice and teacher engagement aspect of the consultation was disseminated to all post-primary schools. Arising from this, a representative sample of ten schools were selected using criteria relating to DEIS status, gender, school size and type.

Focus group discussion was framed around semi-structured questions. A set of predetermined open questions were used to probe participants' views on the aim, rationale, proposed learning and suggestions for assessment. The focus group facilitator also encouraged participants to raise other questions or issues relevant to SPHE that were important to them. In the case of each focus group and school visit, a note-taker accompanied the facilitator and took a written record of the discussion. Feedback gathered through focus groups and school visits was anonymised and collated, and all records are stored as digital files in line with NCCA's Data Protection Policy (2020). The privacy of participants has been maintained through anonymisation, except where an organisation or individual has given explicit permission to be identified as contributing to the consultation.

A similar process was followed when conducting the stakeholder consultation event (See Appendix A).

The online surveys and written submission facility enabled the collection of feedback from a wide cross-section of respondents. Three separate surveys – one for parents, teachers and students - were accessible from the outset of the consultation in July. In addition to providing feedback from a wide-cross-section, the survey responses were helpful in identifying important questions and issues, early in the consultation process, that could be teased out during the later phase of the consultation. In person meetings, carried out mainly in September and October enabled more extensive discussion and rich exploration of the issues for consideration.

Consultation responses

Online survey responses were received from 642 students, 216 teachers and 2,187 parents. In addition, written submissions were received from 56 organisations/agencies and 111 individuals.

A diversity of views was evident with regard to survey responses from individual parents and written submissions from parent groups and individuals, and it was within these modes of feedback that the viewpoints most critical of the specification were expressed. In this context, a range of concerns were raised by respondents to the parents' survey who stated that they do not want SPHE, in its entirety or specific topics, to be dealt with in the school setting. In many instances, the points raised were identical or very similar in both substance and wording. It is also noteworthy that a survey of 645 parents, conducted by the National Parents Council and shared with the NCCA via a written submission, yielded generally positive responses.

The focus groups and other in-person meetings provided an opportunity for in-depth discussion on the specification. The same range of critical feedback received via the survey responses did not arise in face-to-face consultation meetings

Focus group meetings were conducted in ten schools. In each school, separate meetings were held with between 7-12 6th Year students and with 2-3 teachers with recent experience of teaching Senior Cycle SPHE or Leaving Certificate Applied Social Education. Outside of the ten school settings, two additional focus group meetings were held with SPHE teachers and five focus group meetings were held with parents (organised with the assistance of school leaders). In total, 99 students, 48 teachers, 15 school leaders and 43 parents participated in focus group sessions. A further 68 representatives from 40 organisations/agencies, working directly in SPHE or with expertise in a particular aspect relevant to SPHE, participated in a round-table consultation event on October 2nd and seven Department of Education SPHE inspectors provided their feedback in an online focus group meeting. Feedback from these meetings is summarised in Sections 2 and 3 of this report.

Table 1: Summary of consultation participants

Consultation tool	Participants	Numbers
Focus groups	Senior cycle students (10 school groups)	89
	SPHE teachers (12 focus groups)	48
	School leaders (one focus group)	15
	Parents (5 groups - Meath, Limerick, Kerry and Dublin x 2)	43
Bilateral consultation meetings	Irish Second-Level Students Union (ISSU)	10
	Dept of Education SPHE inspectors	7
Round-table consultation meeting	SPHE stakeholder representatives from 40 agencies and organisations	68
Written submissions	Organisations	56
	Individuals	111
Online survey	Identified as parents	2,187
	Identified as teachers	216
	<i>111 self-identified as SPHE teachers</i>	
	Identified as students	642

Promoting the consultation

A broad range of consultation modes, together with the extended time period for consultation maximised opportunities for people, who wished to contribute to the consultation, to do so. Information about opportunities to participate in the consultation was disseminated in several ways: via the ncca.ie website, the info@ncca newsletter, announcements on social media platforms, messages sent via education partners to their members, information via print, radio and television, and an email from the Department of Education encouraging all schools to share links to the consultation with their networks and with parents, students and teachers.

Section Two: Consultation findings

This section presents an overview of the feedback received during the consultation. The large number of participants and modes of response yielded a wide spectrum of views and feedback. In general, the draft Senior Cycle SPHE specification was well received by many stakeholders. Across the face-to-face consultation meetings, and within the majority of submissions from agencies and organisations, the draft specification was judged to be needed, relevant, and age-stage appropriate for 16-18-year-old students.

This specification is aligned with research and student needs – responsive and timely. (Stakeholder meeting)

Not every child can have these conversations at home and it's important to broach these issues in a safe environment. (Parent focus group)

Everything here is needed and more! (Teacher focus group)

In contrast, some of the responses from the parents' survey and most of the 111 written submissions from individuals expressed strong critical feedback. Many criticisms and concerns echoed feedback received during the consultation on the updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification and the consultation on the *Background Paper and Brief for the Redevelopment of Senior Cycle SPHE*.

The curriculum is intruding on a parent's right to be their child's primary educator. (Individual written submission)

Teachers should not be talking to underage students about sex. (Individual written submission)

Remove the SPHE subject so young people can focus on core subjects such as Math and English. (Individual written submission)

Detailed feedback is presented on the following pages.

Overarching feedback

The majority of students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders who participated in the consultation discussions welcomed the draft Senior Cycle SPHE specification and in doing so often stated these reasons:

- The specification provides continuity and effectively builds upon the learning that students are experiencing within the updated Junior Cycle SPHE specification.
- The specification addresses a gap in current Senior Cycle curriculum provision and addresses learning that is needed by students during their senior cycle years.

- Senior Cycle SPHE has relevance and value for young people both today and in the future; providing support as they manage and balance the demands of life now while also building knowledge, skills and habits for life beyond school.
- The values underpinning the learning are important, specifically the focus on respectful relationships, inclusivity, equality, compassion and empathy.

Other overarching aspects of the draft specification that were broadly welcomed included the aim, rationale, the cross-cutting elements and the section which sets out the characteristics of effective teaching and learning in SPHE.

Should senior cycle SPHE be mandatory?

Online survey respondents did not generally refer to the proposed mandatory status of the Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum, apart from a small number of respondents to the parents' survey who stated (via online responses) that they would be exercising their right to withdraw their child from SPHE, while other respondents expressed the contrasting view that this learning is important for all students. However, the status of SPHE was discussed within most focus groups and other meetings where participants voiced strong support for Senior Cycle SPHE being mandatory. Any concerns raised mainly related to the availability of suitably trained teachers and questions around timetabling and teaching resources.

SPHE is the most important class. I don't know why more emphasis is not put on SPHE. It needs to be taught right across 5th and 6th yr to all. (Student focus group)

Without it being compulsory it will never be prioritised. (Teacher focus group)

Reasons given for wishing to see SPHE introduced on a mandatory basis can be summed up as follows:

- Young people in senior cycle need a dedicated, standalone space to discuss the unique opportunities and challenges associated with this stage of their life, including decision-making in relationships, developing strategies and supports for managing challenging times and learning how to take greater responsibility for their health and wellbeing. SPHE provides a safe space where questions that matter to young people can be discussed with their peers in a thoughtful and informed manner.
- The final years in post-primary education can be stressful (in fact, many students said school itself can be a source of stress). Students need a space to step back from exam subjects and in this context, teachers and students agreed that SPHE provides a counterbalance to the 'stressful subjects' and a class where all students can participate equally in dialogue and learning.
- The learning in Senior Cycle SPHE is important for all young people now and for the future.

During the stressful years of leaving cert it's good to have a class to be able to relax a bit and calm down from the stressfulness of the leaving cert. (Student survey)

I think it is very important that students have a class dedicated to staying well and positive, as well as helping them manage workload and responsibilities. (Student survey)

It needs to be taken as a proper subject ... it is sooo important... Everyone experiences these issues, and we need to learn how to deal with them. (Student focus group)

I think it is a fantastic subject that is under represented. It covers a HUGE amount of areas that are vital to our young people's development and it doesn't have enough time on school timetables (Parent survey)

Senior cycle SPHE as a part of the LCA programme

The consultation sought to elicit views about the suitability and relevance of the draft Senior Cycle SPHE specification for students engaging in the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. While not all schools visited as part of the consultation offer the LCA programme, teachers in schools where LCA is provided were unanimously in favour of the updated SPHE specification replacing Social and Health Education 1 and 2.

From an LCA perspective this is very relevant and a lot more detail than what we've done before. This is better. Better to do less and do it in more detail. This will suit the LCA students ... the content resonates with what they want to talk about in LCA but don't get a chance to currently. (Teacher focus group)

100% could see this working in LCA Social Ed. Resources in LCA are very dated. (Teacher focus group)

Aim and rationale

Respondents who contributed online and at in-person meetings were generally satisfied with the aim and rationale. The rationale was seen as helpful in setting out the value of SPHE as part of a holistic education. Respondents commented positively on the balancing of important ideas within the aim and rationale, including the balancing of learning for the present and the future and exercising agency/taking personal responsibility with awareness of wider factors that can impact on one's health, wellbeing and relationships. Teachers within focus group settings also commented favourably on how the aim and rationale cohere with and build upon the aim and rationale of the updated Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum.

I think this is a good aim because it teaches us how to be good people. (Student survey)

I want my child to be fully informed in these rapidly changing times. (Parent survey)

I can see the bridge between junior cycle and senior cycle, when I read the aim and rationale. (Teacher focus group)

Where objections were raised, these came mainly from respondents to the online parents survey; some of whom regarded the aim and rationale, and specifically references to *empathy* and *inclusivity*, as concealing a ‘hidden agenda’ aimed at promoting ‘gender ideology’, while others saw SPHE as contrary to their values or beliefs, or usurping the role of parents as primary educators and as such, they expressed the view that SPHE should not be included in the school curriculum.

This is a parent’s role and not a role of the state. Focus on maths and engineering. (Parent survey)

Teaching gender ideology to impressionable kids is not education. The wording of your aims in the statement above is very misleading and insidious. (Parent survey)

Cross-cutting elements and learning outcomes

The structure of the curriculum, as set out across three stands and three cross-cutting elements, was strongly endorsed within the consultation. The three cross-cutting elements were seen as particularly relevant and important for learning in upper secondary SPHE, capturing the important knowledge, skills, values and dispositions needed as young people move into adulthood.

Some overarching characteristics of the learning outcomes that were welcomed included:

- Clarity of the learning, while maintaining flexibility to respond to individual classroom and school contexts.
- Fewer learning outcomes than in the current Senior Cycle SPHE Framework which should allow for more detailed treatment of topics and extension of learning.
- The learning is student-centred and responsive to the needs of young people as expressed through recent research and consultations.
- The learning is framed positively, and a strengths-based approach is evident.
- There is a strong focus on practical strategies that can support young people in challenging times, as well as a focus on where, when and how to seek out suitable help, support and services.
- The values underpinning SPHE are evident across the learning outcomes; in particular respect, equality, responsibility, inclusivity and empathy.
- The integrated and cross-cutting nature of the learning outcomes across the three stands is evident and welcomed.

Strand 1: Health and Wellbeing

Strand 1 was most enthusiastically welcomed across all consultation modes. Its particular focus on learning how to foster positive mental health and how to recognise and cope with mental health challenges was widely endorsed.

Thanks to NCCA’s extensive consultation around senior cycle SPHE provision – not least with young people themselves – we now have a coherent and relevant curricular framework within which we

can address the key threads needed to weave a fit-for purpose dialogue around positive mental health in the later teenage years. (Organisation written submission)

When discussing this strand within focus groups, participants frequently commented on the importance of young people understanding the interconnected nature of wellbeing and specifically the link between physical and emotional wellbeing. A review of specific learning outcomes within this stand was suggested with the purpose of rebalancing and highlighting the holistic nature of wellbeing. Within such a review, it was suggested that explicit reference be made to enablers to emotional wellbeing that are not specifically mentioned in the draft, such as, physical activity, food/nutrition, social connections, positive self-image and body image, connecting with nature and spirituality.

Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health. Currently there is no explicit link between them evident in this Strand. Physical health can support many young people to manage their mental and emotional well-being and can contribute to a healthy and balanced lifestyle. (Organisation written submission)

Further points of feedback offered for consideration when finalising this strand are as follows:

- Explicit mention of social media as a factor that influences mental health and wellbeing was frequently mentioned as meriting consideration.
- It was also suggested that the glossary could helpfully elaborate on the intended learning in some learning outcomes (such as LO 1.9 –by suggesting the range of addictions that might be discussed and LO 1.10 suggesting what scenarios and social situations might be discussed).

Strand 2: Relationships and Sexuality Education

The importance of the learning in Strand 2 was broadly affirmed through the consultation. In focus groups, students, teachers and parents agreed that all the learning outcomes were relevant and needed. Teachers and students welcomed that this strand was not overly focused on biological aspects of sexuality but more on relational and emotional aspects. Many participants were happy to see sexual relationships framed as positive, respectful, and mutually pleasurable. The note advising the inclusion of a LGTBQ+ perspective throughout the learning was very strongly welcomed within consultation meetings, although contested by some online survey respondents.

Points of critical feedback offered for consideration are as follows:

- Some contributors to the consultation were unhappy with Stand 2 as they are of the opinion that it will lead to the normalisation of sexual activity among young people.
- The lack of reference to marriage, committed relationships and values such as chastity was noted.
- It was suggested that family and non-romantic relationships should be given a greater focus.

- Some participants suggested that a separate learning outcome on sexual consent be considered or alternatively the existing learning outcomes should be reviewed to ensure that consent education is more prominent.
- When considering relationship difficulties, the focus on promoting help-seeking behaviours and awareness of support services was welcomed and some contributors wanted to see an even greater focus on this (for example, students mentioned the need to be aware of supports for those who might be concerned about pornography addiction).
- With regard to learning outcomes which address abusive and violent relationships, it was suggested that the focus should be expanded to include Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) instead of gender-based violence (GBV). Students in focus groups frequently agreed on the need to discuss domestic violence and abusive family relationships, as *'at our age, it is the most likely form of violence for us to encounter now'* (Student focus group). Finally, when commenting on learning outcomes related to DSGBV, the absence of reference to protections under the law was noted, as was the importance of highlighting available services, supports and strategies.
- Suggestions for expanding LO 2.9 (which addresses sexual health) and framing it more positively were submitted as part of the consultation.

Strand 3: Into Adulthood

Framing a strand around the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values that are uniquely important as students transition into adulthood was very well received and this strand attracted favourable feedback across most modes of consultation. Students liked the acknowledgement that they are now adults and agreed that the learning outcomes in Strand 3 were useful as they potentially prepare to move from the environment of school and home. In focus groups, parents and teachers agreed that it was important to affirm the positive aspects of becoming an adult as well as the increased responsibilities and expectations associated with this time of their life.

Really appreciate the focus on transition to adulthood - the realities of looking to the next step in life is necessary for 6th years in particular. (Teacher focus group)

The main points of critical feedback on this strand were:

- The skills-based approach that underpins this strand and the focus on building strategies, coping skills and habits for life drew very positive feedback. Some wished to see this extended to include additional life-skills such as financial skills (budgeting, saving, taxation, mortgages, loans), consumer rights, cooking and meal planning, how to register to vote and apply for a passport or driving licence, and more. However, it was acknowledged that SPHE cannot do it all and many of these topics can be addressed in other subjects and within Transition Year.
- Amongst student, parent and teacher groups, participants frequently suggested including a learning outcome related to being your own person, making your own decisions, being confident in who you are and not following the crowd, agus *'bealaí chun labhairt le daoine atá ag cur bru ort'*. (Student focus group)

- The reference to *allyship* skills in the draft specification (Learning Outcome 3.6) generated some critical commentary online and in written submissions, although this prompted much less discussion within focus group meetings. To provide clarity and avoid misunderstanding, the terminology used within this learning outcome merits further consideration.
- When teaching about ways to create greater equity and inclusion (LOs 3.5 & 3.6), some consultation participants wished to see a clear focus on disadvantaged groups and specific reference to people who experience inequality/discrimination, for example, by reason of their disability, ethnicity, migrant status, sexual or gender identity.
- It was also suggested that the glossary could offer further clarification on the scope of some learning outcomes within Strand 3.

Feedback and suggestions related to the three strands will inform the work in finalising the specification.

Assessment

As previously reported,¹ a divergence of views tends to surface whenever formal assessment of SPHE is discussed. A similar divergence of views was evident during this consultation; with some contributors questioning the appropriateness of any form of assessment in a subject that is focused on student wellbeing, and others questioning how an additional examination or assessment component could avoid adding further stress to already over-burdened Leaving Certificate students. That said, other participants pointed out the potential benefits of some form of assessment; for example, suggesting that it would give students an opportunity to display their learning in a chosen topic and create a shift in the status of the subject, encouraging schools to take the subject more seriously. There was no appetite for a terminal examination although in discussions with students and teachers, participants were generally positively disposed to some means of formal assessment provided it is manageable, enjoyable, meaningful and conducted within class time. They also concurred that assessment of Senior Cycle SPHE needs to provide choice and be student-led.

I am strongly against any kind of formal and some forms of informal assessments in SPHE. This subject has always been the aspect of the senior cycle where students feel the least amount of stress and we cannot and must not change this. (Teacher survey)

I think it is important that SPHE is not treated the same way as other academic subjects – to introduce end-of-term exams would provide nothing but a new source of unnecessary stress, especially for students studying for their Leaving Cert exams, who are often already under great pressure. A less-demanding approach, such as project work and reflection (ideally non-graded) would be a far preferable option. (Student survey)

Important they (teachers) find out what students are taking away. (Student focus group)

Student choice should be a huge element in it. (Student focus group)

A range of suggestions for how students might demonstrate their learning were offered in the consultation, including projects, portfolios, poster-presentations, technology-based presentations, peer teaching/peer presentations, oral assessment and case-studies or scenario-based assessment. Some teachers and students emphasised the importance of assessment incorporating an element of student reflection and others suggested that assessment should enable students to convey how the learning applies to their lives. Offering the opportunity to think about how to apply the learning from SPHE was regarded as important and needing to be incorporated across all teaching, learning and assessment activities.

¹ Consultation Report on the Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle SPHE, NCCA, 2022 and Report on the consultation on the draft Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum, NCCA, 2023

There needs to be more focus on self-awareness and reflection and on how to apply the learning – not just as if all of this relates to someone else. A lot of the time you don't really apply it to yourself. (Student focus group)

The final mark should be a combination of a task and reflective piece. (Teacher focus group)

Formative assessment – should be the focus – finding out what's landed and what are the gaps in learning. (Teacher focus group)

It would be nice to talk to others about what you learned and your opinions. A friend can help you understand like in a small group discussion over a written reflection. The teacher could listen in. (Student focus group)

The relevance of the draft specification for students engaged in both LCE and LCA was affirmed through consultation meetings and some teachers who taught LCA Social and Health Education saw a move to the updated SPHE curriculum as an opportunity to update LCA assessment. In particular, they suggested removing Social and Health Education from the final examination to create better alignment of the assessment to the learning. They also saw the introduction of a common SPHE curriculum across senior cycle as an opportunity to review and update the LCA Key Assignments which are currently quite narrowly focused.

I agree with removing this part of Soc Ed from the SEC exam paper. It would be better if it was not exam focused. I don't think an exam is necessary for this course, nor would it align with the teaching and learning. (Teacher focus group)

The key assignment should be as broad as possible to be inclusive of all learners with autonomy to choose what and how to present. ...Some guidance would be needed. (Teacher focus group)

The final specification will include a broad outline of assessment, and more detailed guidance on assessment and reporting of Senior Cycle SPHE will issue following publication of the specification.

Section Three: Other areas of feedback

The specification, accompanied by appropriate implementation measures, has the potential to offer invaluable support to young adults as they navigate the later teenage years.
(Organisation written submission)

Many consultation participants, raised questions concerning supports needed to enable effective implementation of Senior Cycle SPHE across all schools. Questions frequently raised included: *What professional development and other supports will be provided to build teacher capacity and confidence to teach this curriculum?; What's the timeframe and plan for providing such supports?; Will up-to-date quality classroom resources be available to support teaching, learning and assessment in Senior Cycle SPHE and will these be published in sync with implementation timelines?*

Such questions arise from a concern amongst consultation contributors about implementation capacity. Specific concerns were raised about the small number of suitably trained SPHE teachers who would be ready to teach the senior cycle specification in full and as intended, and an awareness of the potential unintended consequences that might occur if topics included within the specification are not skilfully and sensitively facilitated with young people.

This is definitely a worthwhile course...it is worth a trained teacher! (Student focus group)

It is a huge undertaking asking teachers to negotiate SPHE conversations who don't have the formal skills to take it on. (Stakeholder meeting)

The conditions needed to support effective implementation of SPHE were powerfully highlighted in contributions across all consultation modes and in particular within written submissions from groups representing teachers and school leaders. Teacher professional development is recognised as the key enabler to successful implementation of SPHE, alongside quality teaching resources aligned with the curriculum. The need for accurate information and authentic engagement with parents/guardians was also highlighted, as was communication with school leaders. Smaller class sizes, to facilitate the kind of pedagogy that is required for SPHE, was recommended by some groups. Sustained political will was also alluded to as being important in achieving the vision of an updated SPHE curriculum across Irish education.

The extent to which the stated high-level course aims are achieved will depend on a set of factors beyond the scope of the specification ...Our school leaders will require to be prioritised in terms of communication, consultation, and best practice sharing, if this ground is to be recaptured. This will not happen unless it is structured with an implementation plan and investment by the Department of Education on behalf of the state, as this domain of education has now been established as a national priority. (Organisation written submission)

The specification will also need to provide, in a practical way, for the role of parents, as the primary educators of their children, to be respected. (Organisation written submission)

Further areas of feedback included the need for updated SPHE and RSE school policy guidelines and the importance of periodic regular review and updating of the SPHE curriculum to ensure that it remains relevant to students' needs.

Conclusion and next steps

The consultation on the draft Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) specification generated rich discussion and led to useful and thoughtful feedback from multiple perspectives. The level of engagement of those who participated in the consultation must be acknowledged. Feedback was open, honest, committed, experience-based and expert.

NCCA would like to thank all of those who participated in focus groups, completed an online survey, or made a written submission. Furthermore, NCCA is grateful to the school leaders who organised parent meetings, facilitated teachers in participating in the focus group events and to all of those who supported student participation in the consultation.

Notwithstanding some criticism, the consultation findings indicate that there is strong support for the introduction of the specification for Senior Cycle SPHE as a component within the Leaving Certificate programmes.

This report has presented an overview of the range of views and perspectives across the consultation process. The findings presented in this report and specific suggestions for amendments to strengthen the specification will inform the work in finalising the specification.

Next steps are outlined below:

- Review the draft specification in light of the consultation findings and make final amendments.
- Present the final specification to the Minister for Education for approval.
- Collaborate with partners in education in planning CPD and other supports.

Appendix A: Organisations represented at stakeholder consultation event

The following is a list of organisations represented at a consultation event for stakeholders

Active Consent Education NUIG
Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
Association of Education Centres
Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)
BeLongTo
Bodywhys
Catholic Education Partnership
Children's Rights Alliance
Council for Catechetics, Education (Irish Bishops Conference)
Consent Education Project, Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Services, TUSLA
Comhairle na nOg
Cork Sexual Health Centre
Dublin Rape Crisis Centre
Educate Together
ETBI
Foroige
HSE Health and Wellbeing unit
HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme
Irish Heart Foundation
Irish Secondary Students Union
Joint Managerial Body (JMB)
Men's Aid
Muslim Education Board
National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD)
National Council for Special Education
National Induction Programme for Teachers PP
National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi)
OIDE
Pavee Point
Rape Crisis Network Ireland
School of Education DCU
School of Education TCD
ShoutOut
Teachers Union of Ireland
Transgender Equality Network Ireland
Union of Students in Ireland
WISER West of Ireland Sexuality Resource
Women's Aid
Youth Work Ireland

Appendix B: Organisations that submitted written submissions and wished to be listed

Association of Patrons and Trustees of Catholic Schools (APTCS)
Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)
Belong To - LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland
Bodywhys - The Eating Disorders Association of Ireland
Catholic Education Partnership
Comhairle na nÓg
Concern Muslim Group of Ireland
Consent Education Project, Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Services, TUSLA
Irish Episcopal Conference
Council for the Status of the Family
Catholic Secondary Schools Parents Association (CSSPA)
Debunking The Myths: The Science Behind Our Sexual Health
ECO-UNESCO
Educate Together
Endometriosis Association of Ireland (EAI)
Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)
Family Solidarity
Foróige
HSE Health and Wellbeing
Irish Development Education Association (IDEA)
The Iona Institute
Irish Education Alliance
Irish Film Institute
Irish Heart Foundation
Irish Women's Lobby
Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU)
Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health
The Joint Managerial Body/Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (JMB/AMCSS)
Men's Aid
Men's Development Network, National Centre for Men's Health
Men's Voices Ireland
National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
HSE's National Cancer Control Programme
National Parent's Council (Results of a survey of 645 parents submitted)
National Women's Council Ireland (NWCI)
Natural Women's Council
National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
Oide
Parent's Rights Alliance
Patients for Patient Safety Ireland (PfPSI)

Polycystic Ovary Awareness
Pro Life Campaign
Project One Sky
Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)
Rockbrook Park School Board of Management
School of Education, University of Galway
ShoutOut
Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)
The Shona Project
The Countess Advocacy CLG
Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)
Ubuntu Network
Webwise
Women's Aid
World Wise Global Schools
Youth Work Ireland

Appendix C: Individuals who submitted written submissions and wished to be listed

Alan Donegan
Anna Annaloz
Anne Harbison
Bernard Voortman
Brad Allen
Brian O Raghallaigh
Darina Allen & Karen O'Donohoe
David Maloney
David McWilliams
Declan Shaw
Dualta Rougneed
Edel Cullen
Emily Pankhurst
Emily Vogler
Eavan Dempsey
Evana Boyle
Geoff Briggs
George Frisby
Gerry Kingston
Gráinne Burke
Gráinne Smith
Jana Lunden
Jane Holland
Jean Bryan Loftus
Jerry Mellerick
Joe Keegan
John Melvin
Joseph Keogh
Lazarus Ember
Liam Coughlan
Lidia Ryan
Lorraine Doyle
Lynda Kennedy
Mary Creedon
Mary Fitzgibbon
Maureen Sherlock
Michelle Kerrigan
Mona Fortune
Pat Keating
Patrick Scully

Peter Carvill

Rónán O'Coígligh

Sandra O'Connor

Sarah Thompson

Sean Sloan

Sue Norton

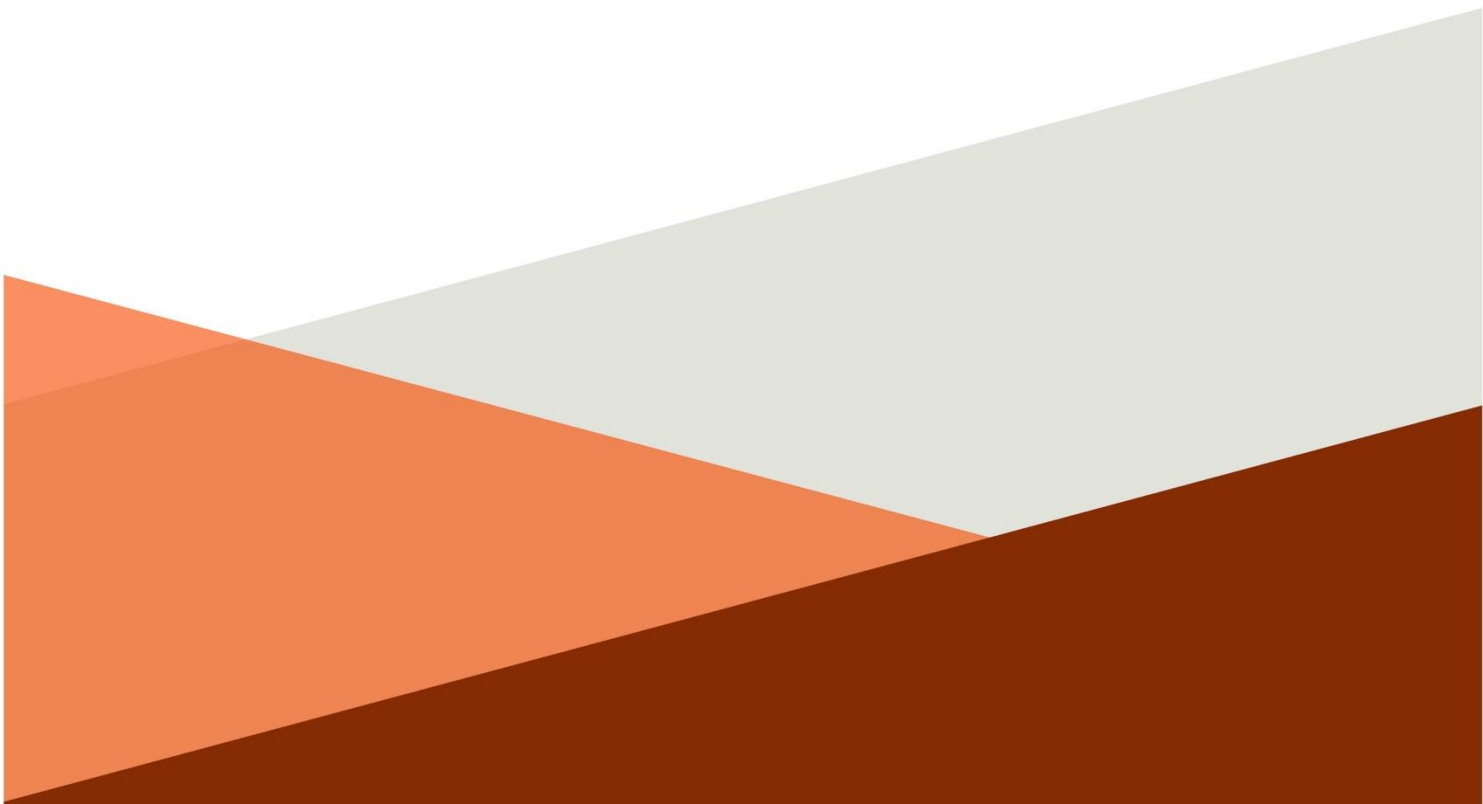
Teresa McCabe

Thomas Smith

Tonya Pell

Valerie Brooks-Healy

Vincent Nolan



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curraíom agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment