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Get snapping!

Marking 10 years of the Primary School Curriculum

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Politics and Society

Have your say on this new Leaving Certificate subject

→

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NCCA

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

welcome...

....to the brave new world of online info@ncca.

Not that new of course if you were one of those who accessed, or subscribed to, previous editions on the NCCA website, but very new if you are one of those readers who liked to flick through the pages over a cuppa.

Of course, you can print off the pages, but in the new format there are lots of on-screen links to additional material so we are encouraging you to give the electronic version a try. Most importantly, we are asking you to tell us what you think of the change. You can use the online survey which is accessible through the link on page five. You can e-mail us at **newsletter@ncca.ie**. Letters and phone calls are also most welcome, and if you happen to meet one of the NCCA team at a meeting or seminar, be sure and tell them what you think of the new format. If it gets the thumbs down... we will have to think again. But we need the feedback, so get clicking or calling.

The big ticket item in this issue has to be the marking of the tenth anniversary of the Primary School Curriculum. It's hard to believe that ten years have passed since those grey plastic boxes of books arrived in schools. The gathering of photographs to capture examples of the curriculum in action is a great opportunity for schools across Ireland to get involved in the celebration of a journey out of the box and into the hearts and minds of children. So if you haven't already done so.... get snapping!

The arrival of a new subject is the big news at post-primary. Building on civic, social and political education (CSPE) in junior cycle, *Politics and Society* is a new Leaving Certificate subject currently in draft form for consultation. Many teachers took courses in politics and sociology as undergraduates – they will find the draft particularly interesting, as will teachers of CSPE. And, given recent political debates and controversies, it's likely that the general public will also take an interest in this new subject. Take a look and have your say in the consultation.

And then...take a well-earned summer break. The *info@ncca* team will be back to you in September with the second electronic issue, featuring your feedback on this first one!

Anne Looney
Chief Executive
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

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what's in this issue

Supporting teaching and learning...

info@ncca is published three times over the school year, in September, January and April.

The September issue will be published in electronic format only. It will be available to download from **www.ncca.ie/news/newsletter** on 25th September. To automatically receive a copy in your inbox, please email **newsletter@ncca.ie** placing 'Subscribe' in the subject field, or go to the website and click the '**Subscribe to Newsletter**' banner

We welcome articles from teachers as well as comments and queries about content.

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Post: **Editor, info@ncca, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.**

supporting **teaching** and **learning**

Report Card Templates – fill them in on-screen

The draft Report Card Templates have been revised based on feedback and recommendations from twenty-nine schools that have tried them out in their classrooms.

Schools can use the templates in two ways:
1. Print them and use them to create hard copy reports.
2. Download and use them to create electronic reports which can then be printed.

The second option has the added benefit of allowing you to store the reports electronically.

Check out the revised templates and the short guide about how schools might use them at ✍ **www.ncca. ie/ReportCardTemplates.** The website also includes leaflets for parents about the templates and leaflets that help explain standardised test scores.

Leaflet on primary curriculum review findings

Want to know more about the review of the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE? Two copies of a leaflet containing the main findings were sent to your school after the mid-term break. The leaflet fills you in briefly on what teachers, principals, children and parents identified as their successes and challenges with the three subjects. It's a great place to check out how your experiences of teaching Gaeilge, Science and SPHE compare with that of others. The leaflet and the full report on the review are available at ✍ **www.ncca.ie/primary/review**.

English as an additional language (EAL) – ideas for primary teachers

Are you a classroom teacher supporting children for whom English is an additional language? Wondering what materials are available to support teaching and learning in your classroom? We've been working with schools gathering samples of teachers' practice in the classroom as well as resources to complement the EAL guidelines. You'll find movies showing how teachers differentiated learning for children for whom English is an additional language while teaching the curriculum to all children in their classes. You'll also find supporting materials for each of the activities and samples of the children's work. See for yourself at ✍ **www.action.ncca.ie**.

ICT in Schools

Multi-media approaches and some of the new Web 2.0 technologies can be used across the curriculum from junior infants to Junior Certificate. How? The NCCA's ICT Framework provides teachers with a structured approach to embedding ICT in curriculum and assessment. Recently, forty-nine teachers in twelve schools, primary and post-primary, used the Framework and gave feedback on their activities in the classroom. The report on this school-based initiative is available on ✍ **www.ncca.ie/primary/ict**.

The ICT Framework project on ✍ **www.action.ncca.ie** also contains examples of activities that were created by students and teachers in some of the primary schools that have been awarded Digital School status in collaboration with the NCTE. There are some great ideas for lessons and units of work for each class level.

ACTION- the place for new lesson ideas!

Teachers in classrooms around the country are continuing to share their experiences of teaching and learning and engaging with the curriculum. The most recent project to 'go live' on ✍ **www.action.ncca.ie** is the Curriculum Framework for Children in Detention and Care Settings.

If you are teaching in one of these settings, you might find it of particular interest.

If you are working in a primary school, why not listen to our new podcasts—one on Assessment for Learning and another on standardised testing? You can listen to these on-line or download them to listen to later, on another device such as your MP3 player. Happy listening!

Curaclam ar líne ar fáil trí Ghaeilge

An mbíonn tú ag iarraidh teacht ar leaganacha Gaeilge de na doiciméid churaclaim agus na siollabais? Fág na leabhair ar ais ar an tseilf, mar is féidir leat teacht ar an eolas ar fad ar an idirlíon anois. Le tamall anuas bhí *Curriculum Online* ar fáil as Béarla ach le déanaí tá an leagan Gaeilge beo freisin. Is féidir leat brabhsáil tríd an eolas go héasca agus giotaí de a chóipeáil gan stró. Tabhair cuairt ar ✍ **www.curriculumonline.ie/irish/**.

You can now access Irish versions of curriculum and syllabus documents at ✍ **www.curriculumonline.ie/irish/**.

Children in Detention and Care (CiDC) framework

Draft guidelines for the implementation of the Children in Detention and Care (CiDC) framework are now available to view and download at ✍ **www.ncca.ie/inclusion**.

An information leaflet on the framework and guidelines has been designed to support the implementation of the CiDC framework, and is also available to download.

An implementation project has been initiated to assist and support schools and units in using the framework and guidelines to develop their education programmes. As work on the implementation project continues, we will be posting new materials and resources on ✍ **www.action.ncca.ie**, so check in to keep up with developments.

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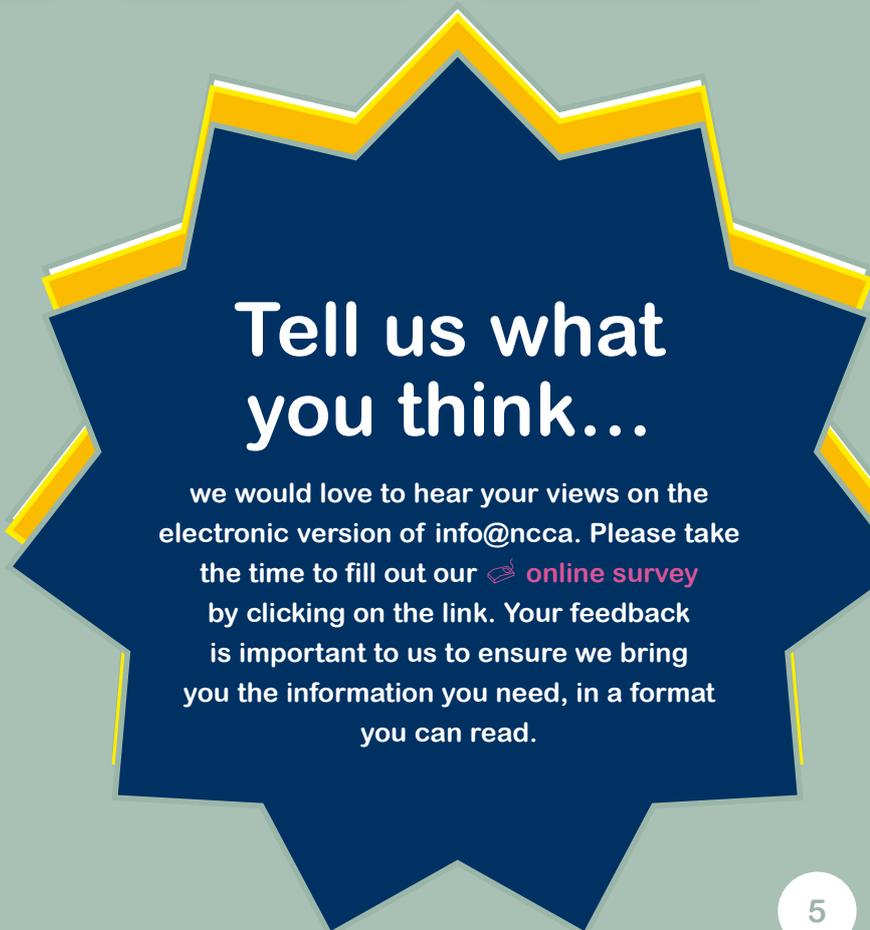> ❝ A journey of a thousand sites begins with a single click…

Author Unknown ❞

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If you want to book the next issue in advance and ensure it arrives in your email inbox, just go to the ✐ NCCA website, click on the banner titled '**Subscribe to Newsletter**', fill in your details on the form and click the '**Subscribe**' button.

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Measúnú
sa bhunscoil…
agus cuir chuige
seomra ranga
do mhúinteoirí
iar-bhunscoile

leathanach 10

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta | EANÁIR 2008 | Eagrán 8

an t-eagrán seo / CNCM: 20 bliain ag fás / Eagraíocht agus cuimsitheacht / Taighde ar an tuiscint oibriúnach / TFC: an plean dofheicthe / Oideachas idirchultúrtha / Athbhreithniú na sraithe sinsearaí agus i bhfad níos mó…

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Céard atá
HOT?
Smaointeoireacht
d'Ord Níos
Airde!

leathanach 10

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta | MEÁN FÓMHAIR 2008 | Eagrán 10

an t-eagrán seo / Nuashonruithe / Idiraonaid / McF sa bhunscoil / Céard atá HOT? / DVD do thuismitheoirí / Réiteach laethanna / Athbhreithniú ar Churaclam na Bunscoile / Céard é faoin…athrú? / Ag luaíocht do thuismitheoirí agus i bhfad níos mó…

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NCCA

Feel like sharing? Spread the good news and email a copy of this issue to your colleagues.
Prefer to read a paper and/or offline version of this issue? Download it to your desktop and print it out.

Tell us what you think…

we would love to hear your views on the electronic version of info@ncca. Please take the time to fill out our ✐ online survey by clicking on the link. Your feedback is important to us to ensure we bring you the information you need, in a format you can read.

supporting **teaching** and **learning**

The 'good learner'

Helping students to take responsibility for their learning

Are you a 'good learner'? When did you learn to be a good learner and how? What does 'good learning' look like? Are we helping our students to be 'good learners' so that they can learn and enjoy learning through their lives?

Part of the task of preparing students to be 'good learners' is to help them to take responsibility for their learning. When we meet learning situations in life, we generally follow five steps.

1. We **prepare** to solve the problem that faces us by considering what we know already and how we can add to that knowledge.
2. We **make decisions** on how to proceed based on the information and skills that we have.
3. We take action by **engaging in learning activities**. These might include sourcing information, learning by doing, talking and listening to other people and working out solutions with them.
4. We **evaluate** how we have done. We look back at what we have done and consider if we are satisfied with the results. We may also evaluate how we achieved those results by evaluating the learning process.
5. We **regulate** as we go along. We reflect on what we are doing as we proceed and decide if we are still heading in the right direction to achieve our original goals. This often results in us going back, making new decisions and changing direction.

These are the steps we follow when we are directing our own learning. This is often referred to as self-directed learning.

What is self-directed learning?

So what exactly do we mean when we talk about self-directed learning? And, particularly, what does it mean for teaching in post-primary school?

Teachers can find it quite a scary concept because they see it as just letting students loose with a topic or a piece of research and seeing what they come up with! But self-directed learning is a progressive process. Learners need to build up a range of skills to enable them to move towards directing their own learning.

The word 'towards' is chosen carefully here, because complete self-directed learning is something that is developed over time and where it does happen it is generally in adult learning rather than in school. So in post-primary school we move learners towards a point on a continuum of self-directed learning.

We can prepare our students to become self-directed learners by helping them to develop skills like information processing, independent thinking, communicating, evaluating, reflecting and working in teams.

Try out the checklist on these pages to see where your classes are on the continuum between teacher-directed learning and self-directed learning. You might like to make a few copies of the list, reflect on a number of different classes and see is your approach different depending on the class group. Don't worry if your classes are not up at the top end of the self-directed learning scale. The further we can help students to move along the continuum while they are in school, the better they will be prepared for learning after school.

How can we help students to build learning skills?

Teachers working on **key skills** with their students tell us that it is essential for learners to believe that they are capable of:
- monitoring their own learning
- being independent from teachers
- evaluating their own work.

Teachers have used different learning activities to promote these skills. Here are three examples.

Peer teaching promotes self-directed learning because it encourages learners to share learning with each other, to receive and use feedback from their peers and to approach the task from different angles. It can take many forms.

One English teacher asked her students to teach a topic to the whole class for twenty minutes once a week. Initially only a few out-going students wanted to do it but since September all students have availed of the chance to teach the class.

A Biology teacher divided her class into teams; each team was given a topic to teach. They divided their roles; getting the information, putting it on a flip chart and then teaching the topic. This is a good way of revising a long section of the course. The students reported that '...*you remember it better when you have to teach it*', and, '*I listen more to my friends teaching than the teacher, they put it in easier language and give you hints on how to remember facts*'. Students got

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Peer correction takes the feedback to another level. In this instance, the students are paired off and correct each others' work. The teacher and students set out the criteria together. One teacher reported that her work was much reduced – *'Seventy percent of the mistakes are corrected by the time I get the copies. They read each others' comments, and try harder for their critical friend than for me. One student said; I would chance making spelling mistakes for you Miss, but not my friend'*.

Helping learners to become more self-directed means moving them away from depending on others to feed them the information. The use of **graphic organisers** encourages the learner to research the information needed, to pick out key points and to record them in a way that suits them. There are many examples available online from ✎ **Education Oasis.**

Making the change

So, if you want to make changes in your classroom to help learners move toward self-directed learning you can

- encourage learners to make decisions about what and how they are learning
- support learners to *build* knowledge rather than *receive* knowledge
- create a safe but challenging classroom environment where learners can try out different ways of learning.

For more information, visit the ✎ **Assessment for Learning** and ✎ **Key Skills** section of the ✎ **NCCA website**. More ideas and examples of different learning activities are available on the ✎ **ACTION** website.

If it's pink, it's a link ✎

Self-directed learning checklist

Use this checklist to see where your classes are on the teacher-directed to self-directed continuum.

	Teacher-directed learning	**Self-directed learning**
Preparation	Teacher sets learning goals and selects learning activities	Learners set goals and select learning activities
Decision-making	Teacher decides what is learned and how it is learned	Learners decide how to proceed as they go
Learning activities	Transmitting verbal information, individual studying	Learning activities include: experimenting, researching and studying information, sharing learning with others, and reflecting
Evaluating	Results of learning evaluated by teachers and exams	Learners evaluate their own learning and progress against their original goals
Regulating	Teacher controls the process and tells the learner what will happen next	Learners monitor their own progress and steer the learning activities

Get snapping!

Celebrating 10 years of the Primary School Curriculum

What's it all about?

It's hard to believe that this year marks the 10th anniversary of the ✍ **Primary School Curriculum**. It doesn't seem so long ago since the boxed set of twenty-three curriculum documents arrived into every classroom in Ireland.

Ten years on, and thanks to the dedication and hard work of teachers and school communities, the curriculum has made the proverbial leap from that box into daily classroom life up and down the country.

While mindful of ongoing challenges, the 10th anniversary provides an opportunity to acknowledge the many successes and achievements of schools in guiding and supporting children's learning with the Primary School Curriculum. Conscious of the present economic reality, we have come up with a low-cost yet exciting way by which every school can take part in the anniversary event. Read on to find out how your school can become involved.

How can I participate?

Step 1: Get out the digital camera

- Each school is invited to submit up to **three captioned digital photos** of what teachers, pupils and parents think best conveys the curriculum in action. Think in terms of photos that capture the simple, everyday successes and the blink-and-you'll-miss-it triumphs.
- Visit ✍ **www.getsnapping.ncca.ie**. There you will find samples of captioned photos together with an on-line participation form and a parental permission form. You will also find information on how to submit your photos.
- Remember, many digital photos may be considered by your class or school before arriving at the final selection.

snap

snap

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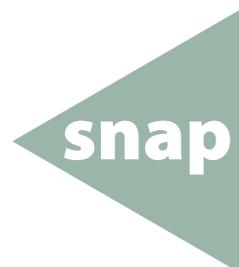
Step 2: Decide suitable captions
- Don't forget to **create a caption** for each photo. Why not tap into the limitless imagination of the children in your class to create that caption?

Step 3: You're now ready to submit your photos
- Go to ✍ **www.getsnapping.ncca.ie** for the simple, easy to follow directions in how to submit your captioned photos.
- The closing date for submitting is **Friday 12th June**. Each participating school will then receive a certificate by email marking its contribution to the anniversary event.

What happens then?

From September to December 2009 education centres will display the captioned photos submitted by local schools. A selection of the photos, representative of all education centres, will be displayed on the ACTION section of the NCCA website, ✍ **www.action.ncca.ie**.

These e-displays will allow teachers and school communities anywhere in Ireland to gain an insight into the daily practices and creativity that define the Primary School Curriculum. We cannot normally get this close to the work of so many schools and so what better way of paying tribute to this work by publicly celebrating and sharing it.

What else is happening to mark the 10th anniversary?

The NCCA will develop ten case studies, or what might be simply called *school stories,* in partnership with principals, teachers, parents and children in a number of schools. The stories will represent schools from a variety of contexts and focus on their experiences and innovation in leading and supporting an aspect of the curriculum.

The school stories will also appear on the ACTION section of the NCCA website. If you would like to share your school's story please email us for more information at ✍ **schoolstories@ncca.ie**.

A public exhibition of samples of the captioned photos and the school stories will be launched at an invitational one day seminar during October. The seminar will highlight the impact of the Primary School Curriculum on school communities since its launch ten years ago, and consider what can be learned from the successes and challenges, particularly in the context of our changing educational landscape. Representatives from the primary schools which contribute captioned photos and/or school stories will be invited to participate in the seminar.

So, don't wait any longer ...visit ✍ **www.getsnapping.ncca.ie** and get snapping!

A framework for all

A National Framework of Qualifications

The National Framework of Qualifications has been in place for five years now. What do you know about it? What do you see as its relevance to your work in and with schools? In 2008 and 2009, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) is looking at the impact of the framework in all the education sectors. A consultation process and report on its impact in the school sector has been completed by the NCCA. These are five of the key points that came out of the consultation.

The implementation and impact of the framework has been a success in many ways!

The introduction of the framework has been a positive development for all involved in the schools, especially learners. Its implementation has been successful in that most of those working in schools are aware of its existence and role. Its impact, especially for those who have had reason to engage with it closely, has been uniformly positive. Factors such as its comprehensive nature, its underpinning of the principle of lifelong learning and its potential to contribute to addressing inequality in education, are all recognised by those working in the school sector. So, it's important to start by recognising it as a success story.

But has it been, and is it becoming, a framework for some or for all?

This is one question that arose in the consultations. Some of those consulted made the point that while schools had a general awareness of the framework, they had little detailed knowledge and deep understanding of it.

The question - what has it got to do with me? – was frequently encountered among students and those working in schools. We also found that, for schools, necessity was the driver of engagement with the framework. The schools that needed to engage with the framework, did, and they were usually schools that work with the marginalised in Irish society. The report makes the point -

There is a danger that the framework is being perceived as being relevant for 'some' but not for 'all' and that, for example, a 'good mainstream student' may never need to engage with the framework because their progression route through the education system is viewed as set, the established 'norm', taken and understood clearly by the majority of the general public.

The obvious concern here is that the framework will come to be perceived over time, from the perspective of many working in and involved with the school sector, as largely concerned with 'alternative' awards and education provision with all that this potentially gives rise to in terms of de facto status and recognition of such awards and provision. This needs to be avoided if the full potential of a comprehensive qualifications framework is to be realised.

The NFQ is becoming a reference point for curriculum development and curriculum provision

Even at this early stage, it is inconceivable that a new school qualification or curriculum component would be developed without reference to and alignment with the framework. For example, the NCCA's work on a junior cycle curriculum framework for learners with special educational needs and work with schools on developing more flexible learning profiles for senior cycle students, are all taking place with reference to the framework.

The influence of the framework has been particularly evident in the

- focus on key skills and competences
- thinking in relation to the nature and volume of curriculum components that should give rise to an award or qualification in these contexts
- development of learning outcomes to support planning and assessment of teaching and learning.

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It's also true to say that the arrival of the framework has resulted in schools giving greater consideration to accessing further and adult education awards or introducing new school awards in junior and senior cycle. All very positive influences of the framework!

It hasn't gone away - the ongoing debate about outcomes-based curricula and qualifications

Some of those consulted expressed surprise that the framework's championing of outcomes-based curricula and qualifications doesn't come up for discussion more often. Because in the school sector, at NCCA committees for example, and in the related research literature, outcomes-based curricula remain a matter of some debate!

The concern, put crudely, is that outcomes-based curricula tend to be too prescriptive, too utilitarian, too limiting in their focus. Some claim that they tend to result in assessment only of what can be easily assessed. Others suggest that they are more appropriate to a training context than an educational context and that, rather than encouraging qualities like creativity, innovation and enterprise, they place limits on their development. There is also a concern that they can have a detrimental backwash effect on teaching and learning in high-stakes settings where 'teaching-to-the-test' is common.

Of course, attention is also drawn to the attributes of outcomes-based curricula such as the clarity they bring to the curriculum – knowing what the learner will be able to do as a result of undertaking a course of study. On the positive side, the point is also made that it is possible to generate learning outcomes that avoid some of the pitfalls above. In recent curriculum development, the NCCA has found that developing rich learning outcomes takes time, great effort and care, and is a very complex task but can be done. Good outcomes can help teachers make decisions about methodology, resources and assessment strategy and can help learners keep track of their own learning.

Nevertheless, the debate about outcomes-based curricula continues and the framework is an interesting focus for this.

The under-developed relationship between the school sector and school qualifications and lifelong learning

When you read the findings of the ✎ **consultation report** (on the NQAI website) you'd have a sense that, in general terms, the relationship between the school sector/school qualifications and the idea of lifelong learning remains under-developed.

This conclusion is not reached in any judgemental way. Nobody is to blame for this. The school sector as we know it predates the framework

and predates the use of the concept of lifelong learning. The sector, as no other, largely operates within the compulsory period of education for learners. So, in this sense, it operates within different parameters to that of further education and higher education. Also, it is early days. The framework and the developments associated with it were introduced quickly. So, as a sector, there's a certain amount of catching up to do. What's more, as has been pointed out by the OECD among others, this sense of the relationship between schools and lifelong learning being underdeveloped is not unique to the school sector in Ireland.

Nevertheless, what emerges from the consultation is that there is much work still to be done, in clarifying the nature of the contribution made by the different stages of schooling to the ultimate aim of lifelong learning.

What is the nature of the contribution, for example, that junior cycle makes to the generation of skilled, competent and creative learners who have the wherewithal to access educational opportunities over the period of a lifetime?

What implications does the mission of lifelong learning have for schools as organisations, for teaching and learning as we see it practised, for curriculum provision as we currently have it? All interesting questions to reflect on in the context of looking at the impact of the framework in 2009!

FÓN project

Foghlaim Ón Nuatheicneolaíocht

Mobile phones – we've done our best to ban them from schools... so why are we now encouraging their integration? Read on to find out how the NCCA has been proving that mobile phones and online chat can be effective teaching, learning and assessment tools.

The NCCA has partnered up with Foras na Gaeilge, the NCTE (National Centre for Technology in Education) and our counterpart in Northern Ireland, CCEA, to bring mobile phones and online chat to 420 second year or Year 10 students and their fifteen teachers in six cross-border schools.

You might remember reading about phase one of the 🖎 **FÓN** project, called **MALL**, in a previous edition of **info@ncca**. This time around, we've added to the ways students can use their mobile phones and improved on the technology working behind the scenes, so that all teachers can tailor the content being delivered to their students.

So how are the mobile phones and online chat used?

Well, phones can now be used in three different ways. To

- schedule vocabulary SMS delivery to students

- facilitate student-to-student chat which is recorded for the teacher

- record student responses to (a) a set of teacher's questions or (b) practice sessions, both of which the teacher can later access.

The online chat is a secure and teacher-monitored chat area, where students converse with one another around a teacher-designated task. The task is based on a stimulus, like a video, audio excerpt or graphic, and everything is recorded for later access by the teacher.

How do teachers and students interact with the FÓN system?

Teachers can draw from pre-recorded content within the phone system in order to set up their vocabulary SMS deliveries, tasks for their students to chat around and question-answer sessions.

We added to the interest factor when compiling the content for the system by asking celebrities to lend their voices to record scripted content for us. Caroline Morahan, Mario Rosenstock, Éanna Ní Lamhna, Fiona Looney and a number of Irish sports personalities can be heard by students when they log in to complete a session. They've certainly added to the excitement.

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Teachers can also add their own content, which allows differentiation for their own class group.

What are teachers and students saying about using mobile phones and online chat for teaching, learning and assessing Irish?

The FÓN technologies are working a treat! Students are enthusiastic about the new learning tools and have commented on their improved speaking abilities in Irish, their increased vocabulary and their increased motivation to call up and complete their Irish homework.

Students are also engaging in meaningful communication with other students from schools around the country, while improving their awareness and understanding of different dialects. They mentioned their ability to practice their Irish at any time, in any place and at their own pace. And their feedback also shows how they are becoming more autonomous learners and using their recordings to increase their awareness of their own abilities and track their own progression in Irish.

From the teachers' perspective, the technologies allow them to hear more from each student and to hear the marked improvement over time. They have noticed students' enjoyment of Irish increasing and remark on students using their phones a few times each evening for homework, often late at night! While they do require more time to plan for and work with the new technologies, they feel it is very worthwhile. Teachers also commented on the technologies facilitating a shift to more student-led (self-directed) learning.

This phase of the ✑ **FÓN** project will continue in schools until June. To find out more about the project as it progresses, log on to the FÓN blog at ✑ **http://foghlaim. edublogs.org**. We'd love to hear what you think!

The FÓN technologies are working a treat! Students are enthusiastic about the new learning tools and have commented on their improved speaking abilities in Irish, their increased vocabulary and their increased motivation to call up and complete their Irish homework.

What's happening?

You may recall receiving the *Primary Curriculum Review, Phase 2* leaflet in the post after the mid-term break. This leaflet highlighted the main findings of the recent review of the *Primary School Curriculum.*

The subtitle of the leaflet – *What you told us and where to next* – explains why we put it together and why we sent it out to schools. During the years 2006/07 we received valuable feedback on important aspects of the curriculum from almost 1,400 teachers, from 8 schools through the detailed case studies, and from teachers and children in the special study on science in the curriculum. We felt that it was important to share the key messages from this review and to tell you what we are doing in responding to the findings.

This article is about the ways in which the Primary School Network has begun that response.

The Primary School Network

The NCCA has set up a school network to focus on the challenges arising from the review. As you'll see from the leaflet, the review highlighted a number of key successes and challenges. The challenges related to time and curriculum overload, specific teaching approaches, assessment and Curaclam na Gaeilge.

The network will provide great scope for working directly with schools, in order to shape responses to these challenges in a way that reflects the reality of the primary classroom. You will be glad to hear that multi-grade classrooms are a big feature of the network, so that all of the work can be informed by the particular challenges of these complex settings.
Three areas of work are planned:

- Assessment
- Language
- Methods of Teaching and Learning.

However, the longer term plan is for interaction between all areas of the network and between all participating schools. This is important because the feedback that teachers gave us – on what was working well and what they perceived as challenging – did not reflect clear lines of demarcation across the curriculum. Concerns about assessment cannot be separated from concerns about language, and vice versa. The views of teachers on teaching and learning cannot be labelled as relating only to particular curriculum areas.

Work currently underway

So, the work of the Primary Network is underway in some areas and is currently being planned in others. The general outline that follows aims to give you a flavour of what is happening by taking a look at work that has already started in responding to the reported challenges in assessment and language (*Curaclam na Gaeilge*).

Assessment

- There are 17 schools involved in this work (9 in a region across Dublin, Wicklow and Louth, and 8 in Mayo).
- With its focus on assessment for learning (AfL), this area of the network is building on the assessment methods used by teachers and outlined in
  ✍ *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools.*
- The network is developing materials that can be used to provide support for teachers in making judgements about

children's progress in learning and in giving feedback to children about their learning. To this end a collection of samples of pupils' work with commentary from their teachers will be housed on the ACTION website.

Although it is not a direct output from the Assessment Network, you can now visit the ACTION website to see some sample videos of Irish primary teachers putting aspects of assessment for learning (AfL) into practice in their classrooms. These video moments are part of the outcomes of the GOALL (Guiding Our Assessment for Literacy Learning) research initiative undertaken by St. Patrick's College during which a group of teachers of second class used AfL techniques to support children's literacy development.

Language

- A number of schools of differing types and sizes, including those with different languages of instruction, are involved in the work on Gaeilge.
- Teachers are first trying out tools to help them to analyse children's stages of language development. This is as a preparation for investigation into teaching and learning approaches. The goal of all this work is progression in language learning.
- The NCCA is developing materials on re-presentation of the language curriculum, and further materials on language planning and teaching in support of this work.

Next steps for the Network

The work of the Primary School Network continues to develop in response to the findings of the curriculum review. More projects in this area are planned.

You can find out more about the network by logging on to ✎ **www.ncca.ie**, by checking the articles and updates in ✎ **info@ncca** or by visiting the ✎ **ACTION** website which hosts outputs from this work as they are developed.

And remember...if you or your school are interested in being part of the Primary School Network looking at any of the areas mentioned in this article, we would love to hear from you at ✎ **newsletter@ncca.ie**.

Meet the parents

At this time of year, your school may be beginning to prepare for an information/induction meeting for the parents of incoming Junior Infants. If so, you may find it helpful to log onto ✎ www.ncca.ie/parents, where there is a range of information available for schools and parents. We bring you a sample of what is on offer.

The what, why and how of children's learning in the primary school

This DVD provides parents with insights into children's experiences with the ✎ **Primary School Curriculum**, along with an overview of the curriculum itself. It is presented through the learning stories of five children at different stages of their early and primary education. The DVD shows how parents can support their child's learning at home, before and during primary school.

Your school would have received a number of copies of the DVD when it was first produced in 2006. But if you would like extra copies for distribution to parents, they are freely available for collection from any one of the full-time education centres.
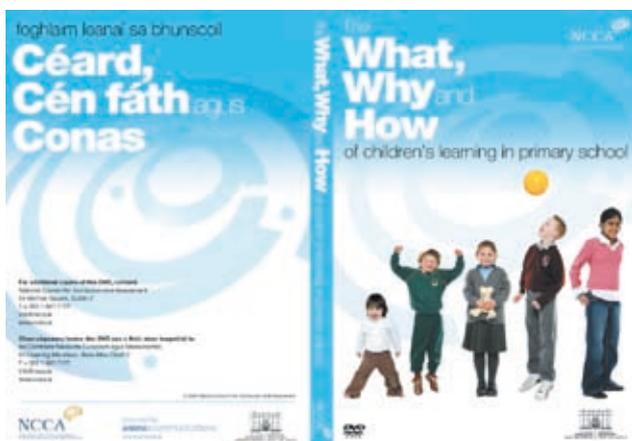
The overview, early learning and junior/senior infant sections may be particularly useful to show to parents of incoming junior infants. It will act as a good starting point for becoming more familiar with the **Primary School Curriculum** and should also prompt discussion on what parents can do to help their child get ready for school.

The contents of the DVD are now also available to view online in ✎ **broadband video** format. You will need a broadband connection and ✎ **Adobe Flash Player Version 8** to watch.

There is also an ✎ **e-booklet** to accompany the DVD. The booklet consists of an overview section and four information sheets – one for each of the four class levels:

- ✎ **junior and senior infants**
- ✎ **first and second class**
- ✎ **third and fourth class**
- ✎ **fifth and sixth class**

The overview presents information about what children learn, how they learn and the approaches and methodologies teachers use in the primary classroom. It also talks about assessment, homework and the importance of learning at home. Each of the four information sheets summarises what children learn in each curriculum area and also suggests practical ways in which parents can help their children to learn.

For schools that have newcomer children coming into Junior Infants in September, it may be useful to note that both the DVD and the online format are available to view in five languages: English, Gaeilge, Francais (French), Lietuvi (Lithuanian) and Polski (Polish).

Tip sheets for parents

The NCCA is developing a series of short tip sheets for parents on particular aspects of children's learning. The tip sheets give practical ideas to parents on how they can support their child's learning at home. Currently two tip sheets are available and these focus on literacy and numeracy in the early years:

Tip Sheet 1: ✎ **Helping your young child to read and write**
Tip Sheet 2: ✎ **Helping your young child with maths**

You might find it useful to distribute and discuss the contents with parents of incoming Junior Infant children. These can be downloaded from the *Information for Parents* section of our website at ✎ **www.ncca.ie/parents**.

Further tip sheets will be developed and make available for download. For example, we now plan to develop tip sheets for parents on learning through play and on subtraction.

We would welcome any ideas for these or other tip sheets.

Transition in science

Moving from primary to post-primary

Remember reading in the January issue of ✏ **info@ncca** about what children thought of science at primary school? Part 2 of that research looked at students' experience of the subject as they moved from primary to post-primary. In all, 234 first year students shared their thoughts through a questionnaire while students in eight case study schools elaborated on their experiences. Read on for a taster of what they told us …

Students' expectations of post-primary science

The majority of pupils in 6th class were looking forward to studying science in post-primary school. Their perception was that science would be interesting, involve experiments and working in laboratories.

And the reality?

For the most part, their expectations were met. Seventy nine per cent of the students surveyed reported that they thought science at Junior Cycle was more interesting than science in primary school. Many claimed that it was their favourite subject. This was attributed to the regular timetabling of science and the frequency of participation in hands-on activities and experiments.

> " We have to test things ourselves – we don't just have to believe the book. We can prove it and I like that "
> (First year student).

First-years reported that hands-on activities and experiments were generally rather prescriptive and teacher-led. Although they valued the teacher's role in explaining science, they were unenthusiastic about the teacher demonstrating as part of science experiments.

The students thought post-primary science was more challenging than at primary. Some suggested that primary science didn't prepare them for science at post-primary. This connected with 6th class pupils' claim that school science was 'easy'!

The students viewed ICT in science positively although it appeared that they had little or no opportunity to actually use it. Whereas first year students wanted more ICT, they most definitely wanted less *writing up* and especially in laboratory notebooks.

Students' future aspirations for science

First-year students who found science interesting or those who felt that they would need science when making a career choice in the future stated that they would study science beyond Junior Certificate. The perceived difficulty of school science was, for others, a major factor in not wishing to study it at senior cycle.

Where to next?

In addition to the recommendations made in Phase 1 of the research (see ✏ **info@ncca**, Issue 11, January 2009), the researchers highlighted the importance of opportunities for primary and post-primary teachers to collaborate. One possible 'project' might involve joint planning of science 'bridging units' aimed at upper primary pupils and first years at post-primary. These units could perhaps focus on developing students' investigative skills and their use of ICT in science.

If you would like to read more, click here for the report, ✏ **Science in Primary Schools, Phase 2** (Varley, J., Murphy, C. and Veale, O. [2008]).

Children working together
(Boy, 6th class)

Children investigating magnets
(Girl, 6th class)

If it's pink, it's a link

supporting **teaching** and **learning**

Ditching the textbook
One school's story

'Open your geography books; we're on page 37' ... **Sound familiar? There will be few teachers who do not use this type of statement daily in the classroom. But did you know that more and more primary schools are having a rethink about their use of textbooks?**

Five years ago St. Patrick's NS in Slane, Co. Meath did just that in SESE. We went along to find out more.

Tell us about your school.

St Patrick's is a co-educational school with nine classes—six single grade and three multi-grade. We have thirteen teachers including an administrative principal, two Learning Support teachers, an EAL teacher, and two SNAs.

Why did you decide to review your use of textbooks in SESE?

It all started about five or six years ago when we sat down as a staff to do our Plean Scoile for SESE. Working with the curriculum documents for history, geography and science we set out what we wanted to focus on at the four class levels. The next big question was, *how do we resource this learning?* So we looked at all the textbooks on the market and reviewed these in light of what we wanted to do in our school.

And the conclusion was?

We decided that no single textbook 'fitted with' what we wanted to do. Were we to work with a textbook, we would have been doing so for the sake of having a textbook! In our opinion, this was not what good teaching and learning was about.

Having decided to ditch the textbook, what did you do next?

The school's locality is a treasure trove of resources for history, geography and science. The challenge was to bring these resources and the children together. Our solution lay in cameras!

On one of our planning days and armed with a camera, each staff member photographed the rich environment around us. We printed the photographs and used them to create topic packs such as *Myths and Legends, Slane Village, Newgrange, Local Wildflowers, People and Communication, Settlements, and Environmental Awareness*. While our packs have a strong SESE focus, we also use them in areas such as oral language development, and responding to art. A real multi-purpose and cross-curriculum resource!

Can you tell us more about the packs?

They're essentially a collection of teaching and learning materials around a topic. So, any individual pack might contain photographs, posters, books, CDs, DVDs and so on. Importantly for us as a staff, the packs do not contain lesson plans.

We see the packs as a tool or an aid for teaching and learning, and only that. Each teacher and his/her children use their own experiences, skills and interests to shape their learning using a given topic. The most important resource in our work is the **Primary School Curriculum.**

> " I have a set of curriculum documents in my classroom and another set at home because I use them constantly to plan my work. "
> (Joann Mulligan)

What have been the greatest benefits in moving away from the textbook?

Opportunities for differentiating learning ... We can shape and tailor learning to meet the needs, interests and experiences of the children in our classrooms. The packs also offer a wonderful solution for teaching multi-grade classes. They enable us as teachers to tap into our own strengths and skills.

We are more creative and adventurous in our teaching. Because, essentially we are now making the decisions about the content, the pace and sequence of the children's learning, and the methods and organisational settings we use—decisions that were previously 'made' by the textbook.

The children are involved in their own learning. They're motivated. They're enjoying learning.

> " The topic packs have enabled us to use ICT across the curriculum; we're also able to focus more on developing children's research, decision-making and high-order thinking skills'.
> (Seán Flanagan)

How have parents responded?

Having no class textbook for SESE means less financial expense for parents. And that's good news for everyone in the current climate! Our school has a tradition of active, non-book based learning, for example, we're involved in the Comenius project. We're also a Green Flag school. So moving away from a textbook has been welcomed by parents.

What about SESE homework?

We ask the pupils to use research skills to find information on a particular aspect of a topic, or they might write up a piece on what they have learned about the Vikings, for example. Teachers might create a worksheet or questionnaire or pupils might write a poem/story/report/interview/letter/poster on the topic.

You've mentioned benefits. What about challenges?

The photocopying bill! But we accept these costs and work with them. Because we place such a high value on non-textbook based teaching and learning, we prioritise funding to build our bank of packs and to replenish resources such as batteries in the Electricity pack.

"

The packs are critical to what we do as professionals and so as principal, I find ways to ensure the staff have the resources they need. "
(Elizabeth Sheridan)

Storage and the management of resources can be another challenge but again we've found ways around this. We use our staffroom as a resource centre. Sourcing resources is an ongoing activity. We're always on the look-out, even when on holidays! But aren't all teachers like that anyway…. The internet too is a wonderful resource.

How do teachers joining the staff respond to not having a textbook?

"

I joined last September. I have to admit I was a bit anxious at first as I imagined myself being a regular visitor to the photocopier! The reality has been quite different. Having no textbook for SESE has given me considerable flexibility in how I work with the curriculum objectives. I ask probing questions; the children ask probing questions; we work together to find answers; we use ICT. I also find myself using a good combination of group-work, paired work and whole class teaching, project-based learning, reading, writing and discussion. "
(Rachel Brown)

Have you collaborated with others?

"

As we became more confident in our own understanding of the process we talked to others about how we use the packs. While looking for resources in the county library I explained the idea of the packs to the archivist. The County Library staff were very taken with this idea and have just published a Local History Resource pack for schools using the archive material they have. We are also working with a publishing company to 'test' resource packs for multi-grade classes. "
(Elizabeth Sheridan)

If you were to go back five years, would you do anything differently?

Probably not. We made the planning process our own. There's no point being handed packs or plans and told, *off you go and use them*! You need to go through the process which we've been through. Since we made the change in SESE we've turned our attention to other subjects including music, visual arts, drama and English.

What advice would you give to other schools thinking about leaving the textbook aside?

Start small and take things slowly. Pick one subject. Work as a staff and use the curriculum as your map. Ask yourself, *what do we want the children in whatever class, to learn?* Watch out for progression in learning—it's crucial.

The thought of working through the curriculum might be off-putting initially as there's a lot in there! But there are good ideas there. Working with them takes planning. We had the benefit of having done a lot of work on school planning and so we had a strong tradition of planning as a staff and using the curriculum as our reference point.

Any concluding remarks?

The more we planned with the ✎ **Primary School Curriculum**, the more we questioned the role of textbooks. We felt constrained by them and under pressure to get to the last page by the end of the summer term! We questioned the value of this for us as teachers and for our children as learners.

In response, we have emphasised the importance of teacher professional judgement and flexibility in working with the curriculum. This requires you to think differently about teaching and learning, to think about it in a creative and innovative way. While this can be demanding initially, it's also very exciting and empowering.

The NCCA would like to thank Elizabeth Sheridan (principal), Joann Mulligan, Seán Flanagan and Rachel Brown for taking time to share their experience.

Student well-being

Well-being and post-primary schooling

Every day schools strive to provide the best possible experience for their students in helping them to reach their full potential. Having identified the importance of providing schools with the research evidence about what really does impact on students' well-being in post-primary education, the NCCA commissioned a comprehensive review of literature and research on that theme. The subsequent report, *Well-being and Post-Primary Schooling; A review of the literature and research* by Dr Maeve O'Brien and the Human Development team at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, looks at student well-being from a number of perspectives. The report is important for all who are interested in the role of the school in contributing to personal and community well-being.

The report is structured around themes such as
- what we mean by 'happiness', 'well-being' and 'quality of life'
- adolescents and well-being
- well-being and post-primary schooling.

The key findings which emerged from the review stop short of prescribing what schools should or should not do. Rather it suggests the following areas about which schools, teachers, researchers, or policy-makers might research, debate, and/or take action. Given these recessionary times, it's important that debates about schools and the purposes of schooling include these broader aspects of human development. Getting through the tough times may well require a particular set of skills, but it will also require resilience, creativity and persistence. That's what this research was about.

Well-being as an educational theme

Students' feeling of well-being is significant for their social improvement and personal growth. This has important policy implications for how schools plan to enhance students' experiences of well-being in school and beyond. The research suggests that what we teach, how we teach it and how students are organised, are all very significant for well-being development.

Well-being as a public issue

This review of well-being contends that valuing happiness and well-being does count and make a difference. Furthermore, well-being is not just an individual and private matter. Rather, the interdependence of young people within the school and extended community means that the well-being of the individual is related to the well-being of others.

Relationships, care and society

It is important that students experience school as caring and respectful. Academic success can contribute to overall feelings of well-being. Feeling socially valued and included is also important. It is also clear that a sense of belonging and good relationships within the school community, foster feelings of well-being. Thus, educators, school leaders and policy makers need to ensure that the formal and informal curricula of schools are implemented in such a way as to establish and develop good relationships between teachers and students, students and students, and teachers and teachers.

Teachers, teaching and well-being

This research on well-being has implications for teachers, their teaching, and the kinds of initial and ongoing professional education that is made available to them. Moreover, engaging in the careful education of students, respecting individuality, and providing relevant and meaningful educational experiences is challenging work and must be recognised as such.

The curriculum and well-being

How the curriculum is understood and offered in second-level schools impacts on students' well-being in a variety of ways. In Ireland, the focus has been on offering broad curricula with little specialisation. Research in other countries has shown that opportunities to specialise in the arts and humanities has positive benefits on the well-being of students. Research, including some conducted in Ireland, also shows that student choice is critically important when it comes to learning.

Including the voices of students

We cannot hear the voices of researchers, educators and policy makers on well-being without also listening to those of young people. Well-being in the context of second-level education requires an openness to a dialogue between all partners.

Objective conditions, resources and well-being

It is difficult for students to participate and remain in education when they experience poverty and marginalisation. The nature of the educational experience provided can influence students' decisions about staying in school. It is also clear however, that other conditions (economic, social and cultural) have to be addressed alongside school initiatives, so that vulnerable groups and individuals are genuinely included in the education process.

The report, *Well-Being and Post-Primary Schooling; A review of literature and research,* is available on the NCCA website. Take a look and see if some of the ideas might fuel a few debates in your school!

If it's pink, it's a link

A new steer!

Time to change direction?

Radio Conversation … Newfoundland, October 1995

Americans: *Please divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid collision.*

Canadians: *Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.*

Americans: *This is the captain of a US Navy Ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.*

Canadians: *No, I say again…You divert YOUR course.*

Americans: *THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS ENTERPRISE, WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP OF THE US NAVY, DIVERT YOUR COURSE…NOW!!!!*

Canadians: *This is a lighthouse. Your call.*

This genuine transcript between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities makes you think about how easy it is sometimes to believe that others have to change their 'direction' to fit in to your plan or way of thinking. In a similar way, often when we talk about inclusion, the focus is on how the student with special educational needs has to change to fit in to mainstream education. Like the naval ship, maybe it's time to adopt a new course, a more accommodating and flexible one, in an attempt to meet the diverse needs of students at junior cycle….

The NCCA is taking a new steer by looking at ways that curriculum and assessment can best meet the needs of students with special educational needs. In particular, we are focusing on those students who, even with the support of teachers using the most sophisticated approaches to differentiation, would never access the mainstream junior cycle curriculum.

To be clear, we are talking about a very small number of students who have very specific and particular learning needs. These are students within the range of general learning disabilities and their priority learning needs are focused on personal, social and vocational skills. They require opportunities that explicitly develop these skills, which will prepare them for adult living and lifelong learning.

While recognising that all young people in junior cycle can display different

degrees of maturity and rates of progress, preparation for adult living often occurs implicitly for them. For the students in question however, this may not be the case.

With this in mind, the NCCA is exploring the development of a junior cycle curriculum framework that would encompass the learning that is most important, relevant and beneficial to the students in question. Learning at junior cycle is currently supported by a single qualification – the Junior Certificate, which is at level three on the National Framework of Qualifications. However, some students can't access this qualification even though they are in junior cycle. Giving students access to a national qualification is a key feature of the proposed curriculum framework. Thinking in this area needs to take into account other developments in the area of qualifications, such as the FETAC awards at Levels 1 and 2.

A key feature of frameworks is that they are a support for planning, for local development and for ensuring that, where local or school-based development occurs, there are some consistent elements to support quality and equity. The framework would allow schools the flexibility and autonomy to tailor and develop learning programmes in this context.

> **New frameworks are like climbing a mountain - the larger view encompasses rather then rejects the earlier more restricted view.**
> Albert Einstein

To date, work on the framework has been developmental in nature and informed by direct engagement with schools where these students are enrolled. Work is underway with a group of schools and teachers to generate a range of sample learning programmes that will exemplify the framework in use. It is envisaged that the next phase of this work will include the voices of the students in question and their parents.

For further details check out the ✍ **Inclusion** page on the NCCA website. Keep an eye on ✍ **info@ncca** for more updates on the framework.

Politics and Society

Have your say on this new Leaving Certificate subject

A new subject!

One of the exciting elements of the senior cycle review which is currently under development is the introduction of a new subject. Politics and Society is an optional, social science subject which will link effectively with Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in the junior cycle. Now that the subject has been developed in draft format, we would like to hear your opinions on this draft syllabus!

What will students learn in Politics and Society?

Politics and Society aims to develop the student's ability to be a reflective and active citizen, in a way that is informed by the insights and skills of social and political sciences. While it will undoubtedly complement a number of existing subjects, it will also bring a social science perspective that is entirely new to senior cycle education.

Teachers and students will work with key themes and ideas in the social sciences. They will apply these to their local environment, as well as explore how they apply in other places. For example, through looking at the changes in their own local community over the last few years, they will have an opportunity to discuss whether or not these changes constitute development, and whether or not they are sustainable. Through making links to the global context, students will be able to identify the roles of groups such as multinational companies, governments and intergovernmental bodies, as well as the role of cultural factors in enabling or preventing development in Ireland and around the world.

How will students learn Politics and Society in school?

Politics and Society is organised around key ideas in the social and political sciences, including democracy, culture, conflict, globalisation, equality, diversity and sustainable development. Students will come at these ideas in an active way, through applying them to the world they know. They will explore, for example, democracy in their local sports club and in their school, the potential for conflict between part-time employees and their employers, and the global reach of television and of video sharing sites such as YouTube. Through this, they will be exposed to the ideas of key social and political thinkers like Kate Millett, Karl Marx, Milton Friedman, John Locke, and Edward Said. They will also get an opportunity to complete an Active Citizenship project, which will enable them to apply their learning in action. Their report on this Active Citizenship project will account for 20% of the final examination.

You can find out more about this new subject by downloading the *draft Politics and Society syllabus.* Examples of what Politics and Society classes might look like in practice are also available to download, from **Action**.

Time to hear your thoughts!

We would like to invite you to take part in a consultation by completing an **online survey** which can be accessed by clicking on the link. Details on the other aspects of the consultation, which include making a written submission, are available to download, along with details regarding consultation meetings that will take place with teachers and other interested groups.

Your input will help to make Politics and Society a better subject. We look forward to hearing from you!