

# Background paper and brief for the redevelopment of Junior Cycle SPHE

For consultation

September 2021



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## 1. Introduction

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015) provides for an area of learning called Wellbeing. From September 2022, schools will provide a 400-hour junior cycle Wellbeing programme comprising of learning experiences that will enhance the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of students. The Wellbeing programme is grounded in an understanding of student wellbeing as *present when students realise their abilities, take care of their physical wellbeing, can cope with the normal stresses of life, and have a sense of purpose and belonging to a wider community* (NCCA, Wellbeing Guidelines, 2021). While every teacher can support student wellbeing, it is further enhanced when important aspects of wellbeing are the subject of learning and teaching in specific curriculum areas and allocated appropriate time. For this reason, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) along with Physical Education (PE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE), provide the main pillars when building a school's Wellbeing programme.

This paper provides the background and context for redeveloping the Junior Cycle SPHE short course. It begins by presenting the evolution of SPHE/RSE in junior cycle and looks at some of the main findings from the recent review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools. Some international perspectives on the practice of Social, Personal and Health Education in schools in other jurisdictions are considered. The early insights review of the enactment of the Junior Cycle CSPE short course is included and the paper concludes with a proposed brief for the redevelopment of the Junior Cycle SPHE specification.

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## 2. Setting the context for SPHE in Junior Cycle

This section sets out a brief overview of the evolution and implementation of SPHE as part of the curriculum, paying particular attention to the experience of SPHE in junior cycle. It also summarises important research and other evidence that can shed light on how the SPHE curriculum has been enacted and what the experience of teaching and learning in junior cycle SPHE looks like.

### 2.1 Evolution of SPHE/RSE

#### TIMELINE

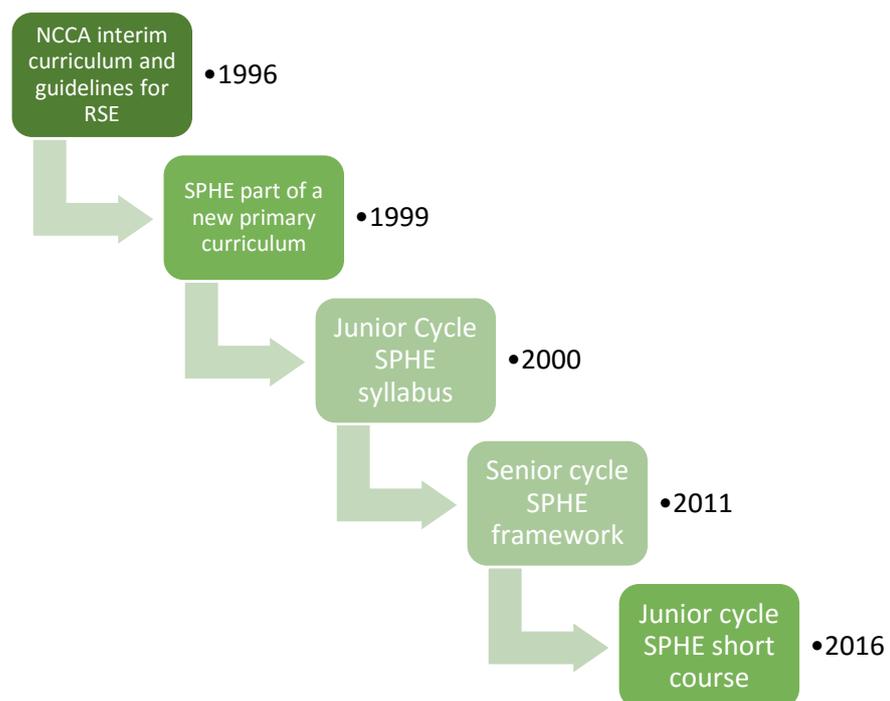


Figure 1 Timeline of evolution of SPHE/RSE

In Ireland, the origins of SPHE can be traced back to the pastoral care/tutorial system of the mid 1970s, and later more structured programme initiatives, such as the North Western Health Board's *Life Skills for Health* (1979) and *On My Own Two Feet* (1991). In 1994, the then Minister, Niamh Breathnach established an Expert Advisory Group on Relationships and

Sexuality. Their work led to the publication of the *Interim Curriculum and Guidelines for Relationships and Sexuality Education* (1996). This was followed by the introduction of SPHE (including RSE) as a curriculum subject at the turn of the century which gave structure and coherence to that which was often informally in place in Irish schools, and secured dedicated space for SPHE on the timetable for the first time.

In considering the historical development of SPHE, the creation of a separate curriculum and guidelines for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in the mid-1990s, is noteworthy. Although subsequent SPHE curricula for both primary and post-primary presented RSE as an integrated component of a broader SPHE curriculum, we are still dealing with the legacy of this early separation. At school level, this has led to the separation of RSE from SPHE when it comes to classroom planning and teaching, while at system level it has led to the separation of CPD for SPHE and RSE. Keating (2018) provides a fuller discussion on the historical background to the development of RSE and SPHE in the curriculum.

In April 2000, the Department of Education and Science approved the Junior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) syllabus and it became a compulsory junior cycle subject in September 2003 (Department of Education and Science Circular M11/03). The SPHE programme was grounded in a holistic vision of education which promotes the full development of children and young people and aims to build their capacity to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

It was recognised at the outset that SPHE requires a range of dialogical and participative learning and teaching methodologies and skilful facilitation on the part of the teacher. Therefore, the nature and scale of the professional development supports needed by schools and teachers, in order to successfully implement SPHE, would be significant and this was reflected in the support structure that was put in place. The Department of Education and Science, the Department of Health and Children, and regional health boards (now HSE)

came together to create a support structure for the new curriculum and the SPHE Support Service (post-primary) was established in September 2000<sup>1</sup>.

The *Junior Cycle SPHE syllabus (2000)* was designed to support 70 hours of learning and teaching (one class period per week across the three years of junior cycle) in accordance with Circular M22/00.

The aims of the SPHE syllabus (2000) were stated as follows:

- to enable students to develop skills for self-fulfilment and living in communities
- to promote self-esteem and self-confidence
- to enable students to develop a framework for responsible decision-making
- to provide opportunities for reflection and discussion
- to promote physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

It set out the learning outcomes around ten modules. These are:

- Belonging and integrating
- Self-management: a sense of purpose
- Communication skills
- Physical health
- Friendship
- Relationships and sexuality
- Emotional health
- Influences and decisions

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<sup>1</sup> The SPHE Support Service for primary was set up in 1996 in advance of the introduction of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum which included SPHE as one of 11 subject areas.

- Substance use
- Personal safety.

In senior cycle, SPHE is not mandatory although schools are required to teach a minimum of six lessons annually of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class (Circular 0037/2010). In schools where SPHE forms part of their senior cycle programme, a variety of approaches are evident including a workshop or seminar approach, guest speakers, inclusion of SPHE modules in Transition Year. In a minority of schools SPHE is timetabled as a subject across all senior cycle years with weekly timetabled classes.

A *Senior Cycle SPHE Curriculum Framework* was published by the NCCA (2011) to support planning for SPHE at this level. The five areas of learning for Senior Cycle SPHE are:

- Mental health
- Gender studies
- Substance use
- Relationships and sexuality
- Physical activity and nutrition.

Arising from the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (2015), the NCCA developed a 100-hour SPHE short course which was published in 2016. The aim of the short course is to develop students' positive sense of themselves and their physical, social, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. It also aims to build the capacity of young people to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

A distinguishing feature of the short course is that it provides a flexibility within which schools can plan a three-year SPHE programme to meet their students' needs based on broad learning outcomes. The learning outcomes are set out across four strands:

**Strand 1: Who am I?** This strand focuses on developing self-awareness and building self-esteem.

**Strand 2: Minding myself and others.** This strand provides opportunities for students to reflect on how they can best take care of themselves and others.

**Strand 3: Team up.** This strand focuses on students learning about important relationships in their lives and building relationship skills.

**Strand 4: My mental health.** This strand focuses on building positive mental health, examining young people's experience of mental ill health and learning how to support themselves and others in challenging times.

Students complete one Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) based on learning outcomes in more than one strand of the course. The CBA provides huge flexibility in terms of its focus and mode of presentation and is intended to be designed in consultation with students.

Section 4 of this paper presents findings arising from an early insights review of the SPHE short course.

## 2.2 Implementation of junior cycle SPHE - findings

### Breath and quality of early CPD

There is no shortage of research studies on the implementation of SPHE in post-primary schools. The first major study was conducted in 2003 and is noteworthy. An extensive programme of continuing professional development (CPD) was provided to support teachers in implementing SPHE. The Support Service was a partnership between the Department of Education, the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive. Regional development officers (on secondment from schools to education centres) and health promotion officers (from the HSE) provided tailored CPD for teachers new to SPHE and for more experienced teachers of SPHE. This included school-based support; assistance in programme planning and policy planning; assistance with choosing and using resources; seminars for school principals and whole staff groups, and much more. By 2003, it was reported that the support service was *'reaching a large number of teachers and providing a baseline of exceptionally high quality'* (Burtenshaw, 2003, p.18).

### Emergence of systemic challenges

Despite this initial overall positivity and teachers' own positive evaluations of the CPD offered by different agencies, research has, over time, highlighted a number of systemic issues which have hampered the building of teacher capacity and impeded the successful implementation of SPHE. These include the perceived low status of the subject, poor time-tabling practices, large numbers teaching SPHE and high turnover of teachers, lack of time for subject planning and coordination in SPHE on a par with other subjects, and a reduction in CPD support over the years. (Maynock, 2007, Moynihan, 2012, Nic Gabhann 2007 & 2010, NCCA, 2019)

### Curriculum options

Since 2016, in planning junior cycle Wellbeing programmes, schools have been given a range of timetabling options.

- Option 1: The specification for the NCCA short course in SPHE (100 hours).
- Option 2: School-designed or externally-designed short courses in SPHE (100 hours) developed using Appendix I planning template of the NCCA Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (NCCA, updated 2021)
- Option 3: Other programmes/modules/units in SPHE developed using Appendix I planning template
- Option 4: The Junior Certificate syllabus for SPHE (70 hours)<sup>2</sup>.

This range of options was necessary as schools incrementally moved towards developing a 400-hour Wellbeing programme and needed time to transition from the SPHE syllabus (2000) to the SPHE short course (2016). However, it also created some confusion as illustrated by 30% of 177 teachers who attended JCT SPHE webinars 2020-2021 stating that they were *not sure* which SPHE curriculum they were using (Table 1). A significant number of teachers also reported teaching the short course but only being timetabled for 70 hours.

<b>Response to Question – How is your school providing for junior cycle SPHE?</b>	
All students following short course	11.5%
All following syllabus	44.2%
Some students following short course (i.e. 1 <sup>st</sup> yrs but 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> are not)	13.5%
Not sure	30.8%

Table 1: JCT SPHE webinar teachers' response to question on provision of SPHE

### Practice at school and classroom level

NCCA reviewed 16 SPHE inspection reports (undertaken 2018-2020) for this background paper. A number of relevant points emerged which are set out below with the first of these

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<sup>2</sup> In planning their Wellbeing programmes, from September 2022 onwards, the use of the Junior Certificate syllabuses for SPHE and CSPE should be discontinued. (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit, 26/03/21)

relating to good practice. Where practice was found to be very good, the following were evident:

- collaborative subject planning and collegial practice
- lessons were student-centred, relevant, age-appropriate and engaging
- there was a positive class atmosphere conducive to learning in SPHE
- the deployment of teachers was informed by best practice
- there was a core committed team of SPHE teachers
- provision and support for SPHE was prioritised by school leadership.

Where inspections found curriculum implementation challenges these mainly related to

- insufficient use of appropriate pedagogies
- lack of clarity of purpose of the intended learning
- a need for more consideration of the usefulness and relevance of SPHE resources (particularly in the context of age-appropriateness)
- a need to consider assessment of progress in learning in SPHE
- lack of subject department collaborative planning
- absence of a core SPHE team.

Where schools are implementing the short course, the inspection reports also suggest that further attention be given to planning units of learning related to the learning outcomes.

The teaching of RSE, as a key component of the SPHE curriculum, presents challenges for many schools too. In the *Life skills survey* (DES, 2017), just over a quarter of post-primary schools reported that they met the requirement of six classes of RSE per year for post primary students; 16% provided between three and five classes per year; 41% provided just one to two classes per year while 5% provided none. With regard to topics addressed in junior cycle RSE, those given most emphasis were reported to be *communication and respect*,

*taking responsibility, sharing feelings, negotiating relationships, changes at puberty and human reproduction.* Schools reported that they give less emphasis to the following four topics at junior cycle: *teenage pregnancy, sexual orientation, sexually transmitted infections and contraception.*

## 2.3 The Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools

Between June 2018 and December 2019, the NCCA conducted a major review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools. This review attracted widespread participation reflecting the deep level of interest in this area of education.

### Student perspectives

The review highlighted considerable variation in the provision of RSE across schools in terms of what is being taught, how it is taught, who teaches it and the time it is allocated. The majority of students consider their experience of RSE within schools to be poor and summed up their experience as *'too little, too late and too biological.'* (NCCA, 2019, p.71) Across all ages, students felt that lessons were often out of touch with their needs.

In talking about RSE, students expressed frustration that the full range of learning outcomes were not addressed and teaching and learning focused mainly on the physical changes associated with puberty. Students lamented the lack of opportunities to learn about the emotional dimension of growing up and to develop the skills needed to maintain healthy relationships both online and in the real world. They frequently spoke about the importance of self-awareness, self-esteem, positive body image and positive mental health and wanted to discuss these in their SPHE class. They felt some important topics were overlooked or glossed over in the SPHE classroom, such as the influence of social media on relationships and on young people's expectations about sexual activity. Many students also said they would like opportunities to learn about the diversity of relationships and sexual identities that exist and would like to see LGBTQ+ lives recognised within SPHE lessons.

When commenting more broadly on SPHE, students noted that SPHE teachers focused mainly on teaching about health and nutrition, bullying and substance misuse with unhelpful repetition happening across the three years.

For students, the key enabler for a quality experience of RSE was the teacher. Students recognised the importance of a teacher who is comfortable and confident in teaching the subject, is open and non-judgmental, has a good relationship with the students and can facilitate dialogical and participatory learning. In this context, students questioned the notion that any teacher can teach SPHE/RSE.

### Teacher perspectives

Echoing the perspectives of students, teachers spoke about the importance of teacher professional development for effective teaching of RSE. They would like to see enhanced CPD and many mentioned the need for both a pre-service and postgraduate professional qualification in SPHE/RSE. In post-primary schools, teachers are in agreement that many issues of concern associated with teaching SPHE/RSE could be addressed if they could opt to teach the subject and access appropriate professional development to support them in doing so.

Teachers unanimously identified the need for time for planning, coordination and communication within their school teams. They reported that structured time for planning in RSE was not the norm within schools. SPHE/RSE teachers would also value opportunities for networking and collaborative learning with teachers in other schools.

A further priority identified by teachers is an updated curriculum focusing on the important learning needed to support young people as they navigate growing up in the world today. Teachers would like greater clarity as to what topics teachers should address at different stages of young people's learning in RSE. Enhanced curriculum guidance and clarity would be welcomed by teachers although some pointed out that more specificity needs to be balanced with allowing for some degree of flexibility to enable schools to respond to their specific students' needs.

Across all stakeholders, a strong consensus emerged from the review that the approach to RSE needs to be one that is grounded firmly in the needs and rights of young people and should be age and developmentally appropriate, culturally and contextually relevant, inclusive in its approach and holistic in addressing all aspects of relationships and sexuality.

Throughout the review of RSE, when asked to comment on the factors that would help improve the experience of RSE in schools, teacher professional qualification, sustained teacher professional support, increased time allocation, and the need for an up-to-date curriculum and support materials, were most frequently mentioned. Overall, all stakeholders concurred that teacher professional development is *the* key enabler for more effective RSE.

### 3. International practice in SPHE

The practice of Social, Personal and Health Education in schools internationally has a history of more than half a century. Responsibility for developing a curriculum can vary from country to country - sometimes the Ministry for Education taking the lead, and sometimes the Ministry for Health. Schools are recognised worldwide as important settings for health and wellbeing education as it is during childhood that most future health-related lifestyles, behaviours, habits and attitudes are formed. Recent research on the link between student health and wellbeing and achievement of educational goals has created heightened awareness of the role of social, personal and health education across OECD member countries (OECD, PISA, 2017).

Appendix 1 presents a summary of the aim and rationale and the main strands of curriculum content for SPHE in the equivalent phase to Junior Cycle in four countries.

Country	Subject known as:
Australia	Health and physical education, HPE
England	Personal, social, health and economic education, PSHE
New Zealand	Health and physical education, HPE
Scotland	Health and wellbeing/personal and social education (HWB/PSE)

*Table 2: SPHE in four international jurisdictions*

SPHE programmes are statutory across the four countries and common features across these programmes include a focus on:

- Health promotion, including health literacy and physical activity
- Fostering understanding, skills and values necessary for forming healthy, respectful relationships
- The development of emotional skills such as self-awareness, self-esteem and resilience

- The development of knowledge and skills needed for healthy decision-making and self-management
- Understanding risks/risk-taking behaviour, knowing how to keep safe and how to seek help
- Personal and social responsibility – an understanding of the interplay that exists between the individual's actions and wellbeing and that of others
- A high degree of local autonomy in deciding how programmes are taught at classroom level to ensure they are context and age appropriate.

The examples outlined in Appendix 1 demonstrate how four countries manage the tension between a flexible approach to planning for SPHE while also striving for consistency and clarity. The need for a degree of local autonomy is recognised, given the nature of SPHE and the fact that students in different SPHE classrooms will have different questions, concerns and needs. Consequently, teachers need to be able to tailor their SPHE programme to meet the specific and changing needs of their students. At the same time, it is important that all students have the opportunity to engage with core learning and that teachers don't 'cherry-pick' safer topics or those they consider to be important and leave out others. Striking a balance between a flexible and a prescribed curriculum for SPHE is a challenge in many countries, and it is equally a challenge in an Irish context.

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## 4. Review of Junior Cycle SPHE short course

This section outlines the key messages which have emerged from the review of the Junior Cycle SPHE short course and includes suggestions for how these could be addressed in the redevelopment of the curriculum.

### 4.1 Introduction

The NCCA carried out a review of the Junior Cycle SPHE short course between February 3<sup>rd</sup> and March 19<sup>th</sup> 2021. This review was designed to explore and evaluate the experience of teachers and students in working with the SPHE short course specification.

NCCA wishes to thank the schools who facilitated the interviews as part of the review, as well as sharing and raising awareness of the importance of the student voice in this challenging time. NCCA would also like to thank the Department of Education, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the PDST and initial teacher educators for taking the time to participate in interviews.

Since 2016, schools have had the option of including short courses in CSPE, SPHE and PE as part of their junior cycle Wellbeing programmes. Exact implementation figures are difficult to ascertain. While figures returned from post-primary schools to the Department of Education (for 2018-2019) report 34 schools offering the SPHE short course, a further 35 schools report offering a short course called 'Wellbeing' which may well be a school-adapted version of the SPHE short course. The picture is further complicated by the fact that many teachers report teaching the short course (or a reduced version of it) within 70 hours of time-tabled space (one 40-minute class period per week) instead of the recommended 100 hours for the short course.

### 4.2 Consultation process

The unique circumstances brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated rethinking how it might be possible to engage in consultation with teachers, students and other

stakeholders in a manner that adhered to public health advice while still enabling the collection of helpful and meaningful data.

Feedback was gathered in the following ways:

- Telephone interviews and/or Zoom meetings were conducted with 16 SPHE teachers. The teachers represented different school types, contexts and geographic areas. Each interview lasted approximately an hour.
- An online survey was completed by 77 SPHE teachers. This survey was circulated to all schools that indicated they were teaching either the SPHE short course or a school-devised short course called 'Wellbeing'. In addition, the link to the survey was shared on the NCCA website, through social media and via JCT's email contacts for SPHE teachers.
- An online student survey was shared with a random selection of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year SPHE students in the same schools as targeted above and through the NCCA website. 437 students responded - 282 identified as 2<sup>nd</sup> year students and 155 identified as 3<sup>rd</sup> year students.
- A Zoom consultation meeting was held with six 3<sup>rd</sup> year students in one school.
- One-to one Zoom interviews were conducted with four teacher educators who are involved in teaching optional SPHE modules in three colleges of education (UCD, DCU and St Angela's College).

Of the 77 teachers who completed the recent NCCA online consultation survey, 54 said their school was teaching the short course, 19 said their school was not teaching the short course and four teachers didn't know which curriculum was being followed. When surveyed about their motivation for adopting the SPHE short course, the main reasons given were that *it fitted well with our overall planning for Wellbeing in junior cycle, the short course included important learning for our students in SPHE and the short course ensured more time for SPHE in junior cycle – 100 hours.*

## 4.3 Review findings

This section outlines the findings in relation to the enactment of the short course specification for SPHE. It presents feedback regarding the aim and rationale of the specification, the experience of using the learning outcomes, as well as other feedback related to teaching, learning and assessment of the short course.

### 4.3.1 AIM AND RATIONALE OF THE SPECIFICATION

The majority of respondents consider the SPHE short course to be a valuable part of the Wellbeing programme. Teachers, students and other stakeholders agreed that the SPHE specification facilitates important learning about a wide range of topics that are relevant to young people's lives today. Respondents thought the aim captured what SPHE hopes to achieve, namely *'to develop students' positive sense of themselves and their physical, social, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. It also aims to build the capacity of young people to develop and maintain healthy relationships'* (NCCA, 2016, p. 5).

Some expressed an awareness that this aim cannot be the exclusive remit of the SPHE class and that every class teacher can and must contribute to this learning.

When asked to comment on the rationale, respondents welcomed its focus on the development of important life skills as well as the inclusion of specific reference to relationships and sexuality education. A number of stakeholders suggested that the rationale should point out the contextual nature of SPHE and that planning for SPHE, while grounded in the specification, must always be driven by the needs and interests of the particular young people in the class. In this context, it was suggested that the role of student voice should be highlighted.

*'Could the revised specification embed the need for greater consultation and collaboration with students in planning relevant teaching and learning in SPHE?'*  
(DE Inspectorate)

Those working with the support services suggested that the six wellbeing indicators could be used to frame the rationale for the short course more clearly than is currently the case. It was

also suggested that the aim and rationale might need to be updated to reflect the world we live in now, due to the pandemic and the increasing use of technology.

In addition, a number of stakeholders suggested that a revised rationale might highlight the role that SPHE plays in protecting children and young people and building the skills they need to be able to recognise and manage risks. Some suggested that explicit reference be made to the link between a school's child protection requirements and quality provision of SPHE.

Finally, concerns were raised about whether the aim and intention of the short course can be fully realised in the absence of systemic support for SPHE both within schools and in the wider system. The barriers to fully realising the potential of the short course are expanded in the sections that follow.

#### **4.3.2 STRANDS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Overall, teachers and other adult stakeholders agreed that the architecture of the short course, built across four strands, provides a helpful structure which should be maintained in a redeveloped course. There was also a consensus that the themes and topics named in the four strands continue to be relevant for young people's learning.

*'I am actually quite happy with the course - as it offers the flexibility to respond to the student's actual lived experience within the framework of the Strands'.  
(Teacher)*

*'Well structured, broad course. Having four strands means it is very focused and covering four strands each year gives a sense of building upon the students' previous knowledge. I like it and I like teaching it the way it is now'. (Teacher)*

While welcoming the strands, a number of people interviewed suggested that Strand 3, *Team Up*, might be renamed to convey more clearly its focus on relationships, including sexual relationships. It was also suggested that the design and layout of a new specification merits consideration so that the integrated nature of the learning across the strands can be visually depicted (in contrast to the current layout of the four strands and learning outcomes in a linear fashion).

The learning outcomes approach was welcomed by some teachers who saw the learning outcomes as providing flexibility and scope for student-centred learning. Others spoke about its challenges and expressed a need for more time and support in planning using the learning outcomes. A significant number of respondents said they would like greater specificity and clarity in regard to the intent of the learning outcomes, particularly those that relate to relationships and sexuality. This desire for clarity is understandable among SPHE teachers due to the sensitive nature of much of the subject matter coupled with teachers being deployed to teach SPHE who may not feel confident or competent in this particular area of the curriculum.

*'The LOs are way too broad and not directive enough considering no initial teacher training and not sufficient ongoing CPD'. (Teacher)*

Some teachers also felt that there were too many learning outcomes although it is possible that such comments may be linked to lack of proper time-timetabling as illustrated by this comment:

*'I think all the LOs are relevant but we only have time to touch on some of them - that's the biggest issue. One 40-minute class per week that students (and sometimes management) don't respect means SPHE is often used for other things and we cannot cover any LO in depth and some are not touched on at all'. (Teacher)*

In general terms, the main theme that emerged relating to the experience of the short course was that planning using learning outcomes is at a very early stage and requires further professional development support and time for collaborative planning - in line with other subjects.

When it comes to specific learning outcomes identified as needing revision or clarification in a redeveloped short course, the following suggestions emerged from teachers and other adult stakeholders:

- The learning outcomes that relate directly to RSE should make explicit the topics that teachers are expected to address, such as contraception, consent, pornography, the impact of social media on self-esteem and relationships, and sexual and gender-based violence.

- Careful consideration of the use of verbs in each learning outcome is important. For example, sometimes asking students to 'reflect' is not enough. Equally, asking students to 'critique' or 'analyse' might be too demanding in some instances, such as LO 4.6 *critique mental health services available to young people*.
- Some learning outcomes were considered vague and would benefit from clarification, such as LO 2.4 *distinguish between appropriate care giving and receiving* and LO 3.3 *recognise their capacity to extend and receive friendship*. Similarly, the learning outcomes in strand 4 that relate to loss and bereavement require clarification as the support services observe that most teachers read 'loss and bereavement' as 'death'. A footnote might be helpful in pointing out the breadth of experiences of loss that could be relevant to young people.
- Some learning outcomes were considered too broad and somewhat overwhelming, such as LO 1.4 *recognise how sexuality and gender identity is part of what it means to be human and has biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual dimensions* and LO 4.12 *compare how loss and bereavement are portrayed in a variety of contexts and cultures*.
- Consideration should be given to including learning outcomes that support student voice.
- A glossary of verbs used in the learning outcomes would be a helpful addition to a revised specification.

Looking to the students' survey, it is interesting to note the learning outcomes that young people identified as most important, namely, those related to *positive mental health* and *dealing with tough times*.

In general, the students felt the course, as presented in the specification, includes lots of interesting and relevant learning and they considered all four strands to be important. However, they didn't think all the learning was being addressed in their classrooms. This led one student to say they would like to have *'a diagram with all the strands so that we know what we should be learning, while another suggested teachers need to discuss with students what they're going to be learning and agree the focus together.'*

When asked to name topics that they would like to learn more about in their SPHE class, the following topics were most commonly mentioned by students: *mental health, how to take care of myself, how to deal with friends who are having a hard time, eating disorders, body image, how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, how to manage social media, how to protect yourself online.*

Overall, students were generally satisfied with the strands and topics within the course and their main critique lay in not having an opportunity to engage fully with all of the learning outcomes, repetition of topics across the years without a sense of progression, and engaging in topics in a manner that was childish or patronising.

*'Sometimes they talk down to us'. (Student interview)*

*'We need more stuff about the real world – stuff in life you need to know but don't learn in school'. (Student online comment)*

*'Shouldn't spend so much time on simple things for our age such as 'how to be a friend'. We should focus on more mature stuff'. (Student online comment)*

#### **4.3.3 CLASSROOM TEACHING, LEARNING AND ONGOING ASSESSMENT**

For some SPHE teachers, collaborative planning and using the learning outcomes to develop units of learning is working well as illustrated by the following comments:

*'Planning is completed collaboratively. Works well. For new teachers coming on board, they can see clearly what LOs are being focused on'. (Teacher)*

*'There are 3 teachers in the school involved in the delivery of the SPHE short course. We work well together. It is important as a department to map out a 3-year plan with the learning outcomes. We don't use books in this school. While we have been delivering remotely, we have shared lesson plans and that has worked well. It is very supportive'. (Teacher)*

However, for a lot of teachers formal planning time for SPHE is not common practice. The reasons for this are many, although the main ones cited are the large number of teachers timetabled in some schools to teach SPHE along with SPHE being the second or third subject taught by many SPHE teachers – both of which make coordination of SPHE and convening of

SPHE team meetings difficult. This, coupled with the shortage of ITE and CPD opportunities for SPHE teachers, contributes to an over-reliance on a textbook and a cautious approach to teaching topics.

*'22 teachers is a big team and we don't meet. Lots of teachers would meet in smaller groups outside of school time but not during school time'. (Teacher)*

*'Our meetings are mainly based on the sharing of resources and what works well and what to avoid in terms of delivery. We decided to use textbooks across 1st ,2nd ,3rd year'. (Teacher)*

*'By relying on the book, teachers are relying on somebody else's interpretation about what is important learning in SPHE. They assume If it is not in the book, it's not on the course'. (JCT)*

*'Most teachers are not using the specification for planning. Planning is driven by the textbook'. (DES inspector)*

The online survey suggests that students generally like SPHE class and regard it as a space where they can participate in interesting discussions without the stress of an exam. Some students also said they appreciate the opportunity SPHE provides to consider different perspectives, opinions and values.

When it comes to teaching and learning, the students who participated in a student consultation meeting said they wanted SPHE lessons to be:

- relevant – *'Talk to us about real life problems'*.
- inclusive – *'Sexual education NOT only for hererosexual couples'*.
- incrementally build their knowledge and skills – *'Third years should have a bit more depth in some topics as we are developing and growing without this knowledge'*.

Students would also like to be given *'a greater voice about what we learn'*. When asked about assessment of learning in SPHE, some students said they liked group projects but felt creating a poster was over-done as an assessment method – *please no more posters!*

Many of the students' observations summarised above are mirrored in the feedback from the SPHE inspectors, and the JCT and PDST teams who were interviewed as part of this review.

The inspectors expressed concern that the full range and scope of the learning outcomes are not being engaged with in SPHE lessons where certain topics such as friendship, bullying and healthy eating, are more frequently addressed. They also expressed concern that lessons are not always age and stage appropriate.

*'Lessons are often pitched at a babyish level and don't reflect the real world that teenagers are living in. These teenagers are out in the world trying to find the way for themselves...they need meaningful and relevant ways to engage in SPHE class'. (Inspectorate interview)*

When asked about assessment and reporting of learning, both the inspectorate and the support services concur that formative and summative assessment practices in SPHE remain underdeveloped. The support services noted a 'resistance to formal assessment in SPHE' as teachers perceive assessment as 'piling on stress' and therefore contrary to supporting students' wellbeing. The inspectors noted a limited range of assessment approaches, with designing a poster being the most common approach. On a positive note, some schools are beginning to use the Wellbeing Indicators to frame their ongoing reporting on SPHE and some interviewees welcomed the recognition of learning on the JCPA that is now afforded to SPHE.

#### **4.3.4 CLASSROOM-BASED ASSESSMENTS**

As with other junior cycle short courses, students are required to complete one CBA in SPHE and this can be completed at any time during second or third year. At this early stage of enactment of the short course, few schools have conducted SPHE CBAs and even fewer have conducted a SLAR meeting. Of the 77 teachers who completed the online survey, only 14 indicated that they had completed a CBA. Two of the 16 teachers interviewed also said they had completed CBAs with their students.

While the pandemic has certainly contributed to the low level of engagement with the SPHE CBAs, the teachers' survey also reveals a reluctance on the part of some schools to conduct CBAs in SPHE. It appears that their value is not clearly understood and, in some instances, teachers expressed a fear that an additional CBA in SPHE could create anxiety and stress for students.

Online responses related to the CBA were split 50/50 between those teachers who saw it as worthwhile and enjoyable for the student and those who did not. The online responses also indicate that teachers need further guidance and exemplar CBAs to provide clarity on what is required. On the other hand, many teachers who had carried out CBAs with their students used the open text box within the survey to comment positively about the experience and welcomed the opportunities for student engagement that the CBAs provided.

*'The students completed a project entitled Dreaming of a Good Night's Sleep and really enjoyed it and grew in confidence'.*

*'We completed the CBA in second year and it covered mental ill health and drugs misuse. These were very relevant and interesting topics. Overall, I felt the students took ownership of their work and worked well in pairs'.*

*'Students were invited to do a project based on one or more of the topics we had been covering in class. There was flexibility with regard to their chosen topic and their method of presenting the project. Students really enjoyed doing these projects as they were able to explore issues that were of interest to them, they enjoyed collaborating with fellow students and developed a wide range of skills in the process'.*

*'Students found it very stressful alongside all their other CBAs'.*

Of the 437 students who completed the online survey, 76 said they had completed a CBA. The vast majority said they would not change anything about the CBA and those students who expressed a wish to see the CBA changed mainly said they would like if it could be given more time. Two thirds of those who completed CBAs reported that doing the CBA *had deepened their understanding of a topic, allowed them to present their learning in a creative way and helped develop their research skills.*

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## 5. Conclusion

In reviewing the experience of junior cycle SPHE over two decades, we can see that progress has been made in bedding down SPHE as a core part of the junior cycle programme. Its importance in protecting and promoting student wellbeing is uncontested.

The review has endorsed the value of the four strands of learning set out in the SPHE short course and provided very useful feedback for its redevelopment. These key suggestions are detailed on pages 13-21 of this paper and can be summarised as follows:

- Review and update the aim and rationale to reflect the current context.
- Update the learning outcomes to enable learning about topics identified as relevant for young people's lives today.
- Provide greater clarity for teachers through the learning outcomes on topics that should be addressed, particularly in the area of RSE, while also allowing for the professional judgment of teachers and student voice in informing teaching and learning.
- Support teachers in building their understanding of the role of assessment in SPHE, including support in conducting CBAs through examples of student work and other supports.

If schools are to fully realise the potential for building a meaningful and sustainable Wellbeing programme, then SPHE must be on a strong footing. In addition, and as noted in the NCCA's 2019 review of RSE and the recent review of the SPHE short course, if teachers are to realise the full potential of a revised SPHE short course, then the conditions needed to support them in providing effective SPHE need to be put in place. This requires a combination of school level and system level supports. At school level the supports needed for more effective SPHE highlighted in this paper and in many previous reports include:

- putting in place and supporting a specialist core team of teachers
- deploying teachers to teach SPHE who have expressed an interest and have participated in SPHE CPD
- providing time for collaborative planning and coordination of SPHE

- providing sufficient time-tabled time for SPHE across each year
- encouraging and enabling teachers to avail of regular CPD opportunities
- engaging in regular review of relevant policies.

In its conclusion, *the Report on the Review of RSE* (NCCA, 2019, p.79) speaks of the ‘*need to avoid confusing the symptoms of a curriculum area struggling to establish comprehensive and meaningful experience for all with the deep complexity of the cause of the difficulty – the absence of a full cohort of skilled and confident teachers and a lack of prioritisation of SPHE/RSE in a number of ways at both school and system level.*’

The curriculum is the main vehicle for ensuring consistency and progression of learning in SPHE for students across different schools and classrooms. However, Priestly (2019) has highlighted the gap that can occur between the curriculum as prescribed (or written in a specification) and that which is experienced in classrooms.

*At the level of practice the terms described curriculum, enacted curriculum and received curriculum are sometimes used. The first two terms comprise the taught curriculum – what teachers say they teach, and what they are actually observed to teach. The received curriculum is the ‘bottom line’ curriculum, in other words what the students actually learn. The described, enacted and received curricula can be very different to the prescribed curriculum, as teachers actively adapt official policy to meet local circumstances, and as learners assimilate and understand what is being taught in very different ways.*

Curriculum specifications, exemplification and guidance documents play an important role in creating a shared vision and understanding of good practice in SPHE which results in quality learning experiences for young people. Other factors, namely professional dialogue and collaboration (Hargreaves, 2018), also play a key role in creating this shared vision and understanding. In addition to a redeveloped SPHE short course for junior cycle, SPHE teachers will need opportunities to work together, to share their practice and experience, and to learn together as they design learning experiences that are relevant to the students in their classrooms. This reflects Stenhouse’s often quoted contention that there can be ‘*no curriculum development without teacher development*’ (Stenhouse,1975).

We are at a critical juncture now. From September 2022, all schools will be providing 400 hours of learning in Wellbeing as part of their junior cycle programmes. This provides an opportunity for schools to look again at provision for SPHE in the context of student needs. A redeveloped short course can act as a further catalyst in improving the experience of SPHE. It provides an opportunity not only to create an updated and relevant specification; it also provides an opportunity to affirm and build upon existing good practice in schools and promote more effective learning and teaching in junior cycle SPHE across all classrooms and schools.

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## 6. Specifications in junior cycle

While some may have distinct characteristics, arising from the area of learning involved, all junior cycle specifications, for subjects and short courses, will have a number of features in common. They will

- be outcomes based
- reflect a continuum of learning with a focus on learner progression
- set out clear expectations for learning
- provide examples of those expectations
- include a focus on all eight key skills
- strive for clarity in language and for consistency in terminology
- set out an approach to assessment and reporting.

To improve the connection with learning and teaching in primary school, these features are shared with the Primary Curriculum. The specification will include:

1	Introduction to junior cycle	This will be common to all specifications and will summarise the main features of the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> .
2	Rationale	This will describe the nature and purpose of the subject as well as the general demands and capacities that it will place on, and require of, students.  The text will, as appropriate, aim to draw attention to challenges and any access issues associated with study of the subject for students with specific needs or disabilities.
3	Aim	A concise aim for the subject will be presented.

4	<p>Links with</p> <p>Statements of learning,</p> <p>Key skills and the six indicators of Wellbeing</p>	<p>How the subject is linked to central features of learning and teaching at junior cycle will be highlighted and explained.</p>
5	<p>Overview</p> <p>Strands</p> <p>Learning outcomes</p>	<p>An overview of the subject will illustrate how it is organised and will set out the learning involved in strands and learning outcomes.</p>
6	<p>Expectations for students</p>	<p>These will be linked with groups of learning outcomes and will relate to examples of student work. The examples will be annotated, explaining whether the work is in line with, ahead of, or behind expectations for students.</p>
7	<p>Assessment and reporting</p>	<p>This section refers to both formative and summative assessment. It outlines the assessment component/s through which students will present evidence of learning on an ongoing basis, and for the purposes of recording achievement for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) This description of assessment is supplemented by separate assessment guidelines for use in second and third years.</p>

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## 8. Brief for the review and redevelopment of Junior Cycle SPHE

The review of Junior Cycle SPHE will inform the redevelopment of the SPHE short course specification in line with the template in section 7.

The specification will be at a common level. It will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 100 hours and structured around strands and learning outcomes.

The specification will be developed in alignment with the statements of learning (SoL), including some or all of the following:

The student:

- Has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision making (SoL 5)
- Values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts (SoL 7)
- Takes action to promote her/his wellbeing and that of others (SoL 11)
- Understands the importance of food and diet in making healthy life-style choices (SoL 13)
- Uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner (SoL 24).

The development of the new specification will

- Take account of research and international good practice in the field of SPHE/RSE as well as the experiences of teachers and students in Ireland who have shared their suggestions and insights through recent reviews and consultation processes
- Be conscious of how the specification relates to and supports learning within the wider junior cycle Wellbeing programme while avoiding any unhelpful overlap of learning

- Embed the key skills of junior cycle in the learning outcomes of the specification and make explicit how SPHE links to the six indicators of wellbeing
- Address continuity and progression: aware that a redeveloped SPHE short course is a first step in creating an integrated updated SPHE curriculum that provides progression of learning from early childhood to upper secondary education
- Be grounded in an approach to SPHE/RSE that is holistic, student-centred, inclusive, age and developmentally appropriate and whole school (as set out in the NCCA's 2019 *Report on the Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools*)
- Present RSE as part of an integrated SPHE curriculum
- Include specific mention of topics identified by this report and the NCCA's Report on the Review of RSE as important for young people's learning today<sup>3</sup>.

More specifically, the development of the new specification will consider the following questions.

- What is the aim and rationale for the SPHE short course in the current context?
- How should the course be organised and will it continue to be structured around its existing four strands, associated topics and learning outcomes?
- What adjustments might be needed in relation to the Classroom-Based Assessment for SPHE?
- How can the specification empower students and teachers to adopt a collaborative, dialogical, and reflective approach to teaching and learning in SPHE?
- How can the specification be flexible and sensitive to accommodate a range of school contexts and student needs while providing clarity on what is the important knowledge,

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<sup>3</sup>Topics suggested in the Report include consent, healthy, positive sexual expression, the effects of the internet and social media on relationships and self-esteem, pornography, gender and sexual discrimination and violence, social and cultural norms and expectations as they relate to relationships and sexuality and LGBTQ+ matters.

skills, attitudes and dispositions that students should gain during the three years of SPHE within junior cycle?

The work of the SPHE Post-primary Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of its work and discussions, refinements to some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief. The updated specification will be presented for consultation to Council in Q1, 2022.

## Appendix 1: International practice in SPHE

### Australia

**Health and physical education (HPE)** is one of eight learning areas in the Australian Curriculum Foundation to Year 10 (F-10) for 5- to 16-year-olds. Years 7-10 of the Australian Curriculum provide the framework for learning for young people aged 12-16 in secondary education.

#### AIM AND RATIONALE OF HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

HPE aims to enable young Australians to cope with life's challenges, and to flourish as healthy, safe and active citizens in a 21st century characterized by an increasingly complex, sedentary and rapidly changing world. In HPE, they develop the skills, knowledge, and understanding to strengthen their sense of self, and build and manage satisfying, respectful relationships. They learn to build on personal and community strengths and assets to enhance safety and wellbeing and they critique and challenge assumptions and stereotypes. They also learn to navigate a range of health-related sources, services and organisations.

HPE provides experiential learning through a curriculum that aims to be relevant, engaging, contemporary, physically active, enjoyable and developmentally appropriate. Integral to HPE is:

- the acquisition of movement skills, concepts and strategies to enable students to participate in a range of physical activities confidently and competently
- the development of knowledge, understanding and skills to support them to be resilient, to develop a strong sense of self, to build and maintain satisfying relationships, to make health-enhancing decisions in relation to their health and physical activity participation, and to develop health literacy competencies in order to enhance their own and others' health and wellbeing.

## **CURRICULUM CONTENT**

HPE in the F-10 Curriculum is organised in two, interrelated content **strands: personal, social and community health and movement and physical activity.**

There are also 10 **focus areas** which are expected to contribute substantially to the HPE teaching and learning programme of young people aged 12-16:

- Alcohol and other drugs
- Food and nutrition
- Health benefits of physical activity
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Relationships and sexuality
- Safety
- Challenge and adventure activities
- Games and sports
- Lifelong physical activities
- Rhythmic and expressive activities

## **TIME ALLOCATION**

Guidance from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) states that decisions about the actual organisation and delivery of the curriculum are best taken at school level. It does, however, provide indicative percentages of teaching time and the indicative percentage is that 8% of teaching time is allocated to HPE. This is the same proportion as that recommended for languages, and for the arts, and compares with 12% for English and mathematics (ACARA, 2013, p.9).

In addition, as a minimum, all students are expected to be provided with the opportunity to participate in physical activity on a weekly basis as part of the HPE curriculum.

## England

**Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE)** is a non-statutory subject in the Key Stage 3 curriculum (pupils aged 11-14) and it includes two statutory components:

- relationships and sex and education (RSE)
- health education: physical health and mental wellbeing

### AIM AND RATIONALE

PSHE is a planned programme of learning opportunities and experiences to help children and young people grow and develop as individuals, and as members of families and of social and economic communities. It is regarded as an important and necessary part of all young peoples' education and all schools are expected to teach both statutory and non-statutory components. The National Curriculum states that all schools 'should make provision for PSHE drawing on good practice' (DfE, 2020a). While schools are encouraged to tailor their local PSHE programme to reflect the needs of their pupils, 'we expect schools to use their PSHE education programme to equip pupils with a sound understanding of risk and with the knowledge and skills necessary to make safe and informed decisions'<sup>4</sup>.

PSHE education aims to provide a 'balanced and broadly-based curriculum' which promotes 'the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life'.

### CURRICULUM CONTENT

Outside the statutory requirements for RSE and health education, the Department for Education (DfE) does not provide standardised frameworks or programmes of study for PSHE. This is intended to allow flexibility to teachers to deliver high-quality PSHE

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe/personal-social-health-and-economic-pshe-education>

programmes, as they are 'best placed to understand the needs of their pupils and do not need additional central prescription'(DfE, 2020).

The DfE does, however, expect schools to use their PSHE education programme to equip pupils with a sound understanding of risk and with the knowledge and skills necessary to make safe and informed decisions.

### **A programme of study**

The PSHE Association supports schools in developing their PSHE curriculum. It has developed a [programme of study](#) for PSHE covering Key Stages 1-5 (pupils from age 5 to 18).

In Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14), the programme of study is set out under three core themes:

- Health and wellbeing, which covers
  - self-concept
  - mental health and emotional wellbeing
  - healthy lifestyles
  - drugs, alcohol and tobacco
  - managing risk and personal safety
  - puberty and sexual health.
- Relationships, which covers
  - positive relationships
  - relationship values
  - forming and maintaining respectful relationships
  - consent
  - contraception and parenthood
  - bullying, abuse and discrimination
  - social influences.
- Living in the wider world, which covers
  - learning skills
  - choices and pathways

- work and career
- employment rights and responsibilities
- financial choices
- media literacy and digital resilience.

### **TIME ALLOCATION**

Legislation (the Education Act 2002) determines that the Government does not prescribe the amount of time to be allocated to individual subjects in the National Curriculum; consequently, there is no guidance for the time to be allocated to PSHE.

## New Zealand

### AIM AND RATIONALE

**Health and physical education (HPE)** is one of eight learning areas in [The New Zealand Curriculum](#). It aims to enable young people to develop the knowledge, values, and competencies to live full and active lives, and to take responsibility for improving their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities. The focus is on helping students to grow as ‘confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners’ (in line with the overarching curriculum aims), who are ready to contribute to their world, and to take action towards improving wellbeing through learning in health-related and movement contexts.

HPE enables students to develop resilience and a sense of personal and social responsibility so that, as they become increasingly able to take responsibility for themselves, they contribute to the wellbeing of those around them, of their communities, of their environments (including natural environments), and of wider society.

The [HPE learning area](#) is based on four underlying and interdependent concepts:

- Hauora – a Māori philosophy of wellbeing that includes dimensions relating to spiritual, mental and emotional, physical, and social wellbeing.
- Attitudes and values – a positive, responsible attitude on the part of students to their own wellbeing; respect, care, and concern for other people and the environment; and a sense of social justice.
- The socio-ecological perspective – a way of viewing and understanding the interrelationships that exist between the individual, others, and society.
- Health promotion – a process that helps to develop and maintain supportive physical and emotional environments and that involves students in personal and collective action.

### CURRICULUM CONTENT

HPE includes three different but related subjects - health education, physical education, and home economics, which share a conceptual framework and achievement objectives.

Learning activities are based on the integration of the **four concepts** of Hauora, attitudes and values, the socio-ecological perspective, and health promotion (above), **four curriculum strands** and their learning objectives, and **seven key areas of learning**.

The **four strands** are:

- Personal health and physical development, in which students develop the knowledge, understandings, skills, and attitudes they need in order to maintain and enhance their personal wellbeing and physical development. It includes -
  - personal growth and development
  - regular physical activity
  - safety management
  - personal identity.
- Movement concepts and motor skills, in which students develop motor skills, knowledge and understandings about movement, and positive attitudes towards physical activity. It includes -
  - movement skills
  - positive attitudes
  - science and technology
  - challenges and social and cultural factors.
- Relationships with other people, in which students develop understandings, skills, and attitudes that enhance their interactions and relationships with others. It includes -
  - relationships
  - identity, sensitivity and respect
  - interpersonal skills.
- Healthy communities and environments, in which students contribute to healthy communities and environments by taking responsible and critical action. It includes -
  - societal attitudes and values
  - community resources
  - rights, responsibilities and laws
  - people and the environment.

The **seven key areas of learning** are:

- mental health
- sexuality education
- food and nutrition
- body care and physical safety
- physical activity
- sport studies
- outdoor education.

All seven areas are included in teaching and learning programmes at both primary and secondary levels. It is also expected that all students will have had opportunities to learn practical cooking skills by the end of Year 8 (secondary education, age 13).

There is no guidance on the time to be allocated to teaching the programme.

## Scotland

### AIM AND RATIONALE

Health and wellbeing education is one of eight curriculum areas of [Curriculum for Excellence](#). The third level of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) relates to pupils in Secondary 1-3 (ages 12-15).

Learning in **health and wellbeing education/personal and social education (HWB/PSE)** is designed to ensure that children and young people develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, resilience, capabilities and attributes which they need for mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing now and in the future.

Through the teaching of HWB/PSE, children and young people can expect their learning environment to support them to:

- develop self-awareness, self-worth and respect for others
- meet challenges, manage change and build relationships
- experience personal achievement and build resilience and confidence
- understand and develop physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing and social skills
- understand how what they eat, how active they are and how they make decisions about their behaviour and relationships affects their physical and mental wellbeing
- participate in a wide range of activities which promote a healthy lifestyle
- understand that adults in the school community have a responsibility to look after them, listen to their concerns and involve others where necessary
- learn about where to find help and resources to inform choices
- assess and manage risk and understand the impact of risk-taking behaviour
- reflect on their strengths and skills to help them make informed choices when planning next steps
- acknowledge diversity and understand that it is everyone's responsibility to challenge discrimination.

## **CURRICULUM CONTENT: HEALTH AND WELLBEING CURRICULUM AREA**

The health and wellbeing curriculum area is organised in six sub-areas/strands:

1. mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing - broken down into mental and emotional wellbeing; social wellbeing; physical wellbeing
2. planning for choices and changes
3. physical education, physical activity and sport - broken down into:
  - physical education including movement skills, competencies and concepts; cooperation and competition; evaluating and appreciating
  - physical activity and sport
  - physical activity and health
4. food and health - broken down into nutrition; safe and hygienic practices; and food and the consumer)
5. substance misuse
6. relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP).

The areas planning for choices and changes; food and health; substance misuse; relationships, sexual health and parenthood, and aspects of physical activity, sport and health, are taught in specific timetabled lessons. Mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing; additional aspects of planning for choice and changes; and of relationships are the responsibility of all teachers and taught under the requirements for health and wellbeing across learning.

The two key Curriculum for Excellence resources, which support teachers to plan learning, teaching and assessment in health and wellbeing education/personal and social education (HWB/PSE), are the experiences and outcomes for health and wellbeing and the national benchmarks for personal and social education.

The benchmarks for health and wellbeing/personal and social education for Secondary 1-3 (ages 12-15) set out the timetabled subject requirements as:

- Planning for choices and changes - expectations and aspirations; relevance of learning to future choices
- Physical activity and health - diet, rest and sleep

- Substance misuse - use of substances; informed choices; risk-taking behaviour; action in unsafe situations
- Relationships, sexual health and parenthood - positive relationships; physical changes; sexual health and sexuality; role of parent/carer.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING ACROSS LEARNING

Learning through health and wellbeing is intended to promote confidence, independent thinking and positive attitudes and dispositions. Because of this, it is also the responsibility of every teacher to contribute to learning and development in this area. Health and Wellbeing Across Learning: Responsibilities of All (Scottish Government) expects all Secondary 1-Secondary 3 (S1-S3) teachers to promote health and wellbeing, paying particular attention to three areas:

- Mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing, which is regarded as essential for successful learning.
- Planning for choice and changes (develop the skills and attributes they will need for learning, life and work)
- Relationships, which is intended to allow learners to develop the qualities and skills to maintain positive relationships.

## TIME ALLOCATION

Curriculum for Excellence sets out what a young person should be able to do and the experiences that contribute to their learning, rather than detailed definitions of content or prescribed hours of study.

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## Appendix 2: Interview questions for teachers

Q 1 Is your school offering the SPHE short course? **If answer is yes proceed to Qs, 2,3,4,5, etc**

**If not**, ask what is guiding the teaching and learning and what learning they think has been most useful/relevant for their students in junior cycle SPHE?

Then go to Q 6

Q 2 Looking at the aim and rationale of the course – does it capture what’s really important. Does the aim and/or rationale need updating or re-focusing in any way? Explain please.

Q 3 – Looking at the 4 strands – is this the best way to organise the important learning in SPHE – any suggestions for organising or naming the areas of learning differently?

Q 4 – Looking at the LOs in each strand –

- a. Are there any omissions or topics that need to be given more emphasis or added explicitly?
- b. Are there any particular LOs that are unclear or problematic?
- c. Are there any particular LOs that have really worked well? Explain please.

Q 5. How about planning using the learning outcomes? Is that working? Why/why not? What opportunities and challenges have you had? Is there a SPHE subject department and do you get time to plan collaboratively?

Q 6 Considering the question of inclusion do you find this course is accessible and relevant to students of all backgrounds and abilities/disabilities?

Q 7 What feedback would you like to give us about doing the CBA? Prompts – from your perspective were the Guidelines helpful or is anything missing? From the students’ perspective, what was their experience like?

Q 8 What feedback do you have on the experience of participating in SLAR meeting for SPHE (if you have had a SLAR)

Q 9 Has the new Junior Cycle changed the way you assess and report on learning and achievement in SPHE to students and parents?

Q 10 Have you encouraged students to keep a learning diary? Has it been useful?

Q 11. Finally, what have been the main successes and challenges so far in teaching the short course? (And in the case of teachers not teaching the short course, what have been the successes and challenges for them in teaching junior cycle SPHE?)

Any other comments or suggestions for how to improve this short course?

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