

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

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Date	
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Yes

No

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

Trócaire is the official overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland. We have a dual mandate. Overseas, we work in partnership with communities in over 20 countries to relieve poverty and tackle injustice. In Ireland, we educate the Irish public about these justice issues and encourage action for change.

We believe that working for global justice is a lifelong journey. That journey starts at a young age when children begin to learn about the world they live in and the role they can play in creating a future of dignity and safety for all. Trócaire's Development Education programmes give young people in Ireland an opportunity to explore global justice issues in the formal and non-formal sectors.

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

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

The following are Trócaire's key responses, which are elaborated further throughout the document.

1. GLOBAL DIMENSION

Trócaire welcomes the focus on active citizenship but would like to see more of an emphasis on the **global dimension** throughout the framework.

Recommendation: Change the competency 'being an active citizen' to being an active global citizen'.

2. ETHNIC/CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Trócaire welcomes the focus on inclusive education and diversity but would like to see cultural **diversity** highlighted.

Recommendation: Reference and incorporate elements from the range of excellent guidelines for Intercultural Education and for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion produced by Department of Education and Skills (DES), National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) throughout the framework.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS

Trócaire supports using the principles of Universal Design for Learning to shape the curriculum specification development process. However, we suggest that the final framework and curriculum specification development processes also draw on the **United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**.

Trócaire welcomes the explicit mention of rights in the citizenship competency. However, we do not think rights should only sit in this competency, rather the CRC should underpin the whole framework. The 2012 referendum brought about the 31st amendment to the Irish constitution, explicitly recognising the rights of the child in Ireland. This creates a

constitutional imperative around child voice and participation which, amongst other places, should be implemented in schools and therefore we argue, in the curriculum.

Recommendation: Changing the principle of 'engagement' to 'engagement and participation'.

Recommendation: Decoupling responsibilities from rights and renaming the first attribute of the citizenship competency 'understanding and realising human rights'.

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

ACTIVE GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Trócaire welcomes the focus on active citizenship. The experience of Trócaire is that many primary schools have been exploring Global Citizenship Education despite it not being explicit in the current curriculum (1999). There is a lot of good practice already in this area. Therefore, including a focus on citizenship education in the new framework will formalise space for this work. It will also provide support and guidance to schools that have not focused on this area to date. However, **Trócaire would like to see more of an emphasis on the global dimension** in the framework and suggests changing the name of competency 'being an active citizen' to 'being an active global citizen'.

We also **recommend that the use of the words 'global' and 'wider community' be further emphasised throughout the framework.** Trócaire believes that the current framework has too much of an emphasis on the individual and misses out on a sense of community or collective. In our ever-increasing globalised society, it is crucial that children at primary level explore links between the **local and the global** community and indeed between individuals and communities. It is

important that children have the opportunity to examine the interdependent nature of the world and the impact of their actions on people and the environment globally.

For example, if we look at global issues such as COVID-19, Climate Change or the Black Lives Matter movement, children need to have some understanding of how these connect with their own lives, their schools, local communities and home. **Trócaire welcomes the flexible time**, as it allows schools to choose societal issues most relevant to them to examine through project work. It also provides them with the opportunity to take action for positive change outside of the classroom.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Provide a clear vision for children’s learning across the eight years of primary school.
- Link with learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connect with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.
- Support educational transitions by connecting with what and how children learn at home, in preschool and post-primary school.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

There are positive aspects of Aistear and the junior cycle framework that we would like to see coming out more in primary framework.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP IN AISTEAR

Trócaire and St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra have undertaken research into young children’s engagement with issues of global justice¹. The research indicates that young children are capable of **engaging with global justice issues** provided the strategies are appropriate to their age and cognitive development. The research points to the opportunity which exists to engage children at

¹ A report by the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra and Trócaire (Ruane, 2010)

an early age with issues which have been previously viewed as beyond their world and level of understanding. It also points to the opportunity to expand the prevailing emphasis on aspects related to ethnic diversity and culture when introducing young children to the wider world.

Aistear, the early childhood curriculum framework (NCCA, 2009) already provides a unique opportunity to promote the inclusion of a global and justice perspective in education programmes for young children at pre-school and junior primary school levels. The framework highlights the importance of global citizenship and diversity issues and provides the opportunity to support educators engaged in their implementation. Trócaire would like to see this coming through stronger in the primary framework.

PARTICIPATION

According to Article 12 of the CRC, children have the right to express their views and to have those views considered, in an age-appropriate manner. Schools have a responsibility to respect that right. Laura Lundy argues that child participation in decision making is a legal imperative and should not be portrayed as an option which is a gift from adults². Therefore, Trocaire argues that if children are to actively engage in decision making processes, they must have a curriculum must supports them to do so.

Trócaire **welcomes the principle of engagement in the draft framework but would also like to see a focus on participation**. Therefore, we suggest changing the name of the principle to ‘Engagement and Participation’. Not only would this strengthen child voice in the framework, but it would also link in further with the Junior Cycle framework.

Emerging priorities for children’s learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Embed seven key competencies across children’s learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.

² ‘Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Laura Lundy 2005

- Focus on developing children’s skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies are broad in nature to describe this wider understanding of learning.
- Have increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning, and have new aspects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children’s learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION (HRE)

Research carried out in Irish primary schools in 2016³ revealed teachers are generally in support of HRE. However, there is an unclear understanding of rights amongst educators and a focus on responsibility over entitlement.

According to James Nickel⁴ coupling rights and responsibilities ignores the universality and inalienability of human rights, positioning them instead in a social contract. A balance between rights and responsibilities is necessary for HRE as education towards empowerment rather than social conformity and control. Therefore, **Trócaire suggests decoupling responsibilities from rights and renaming the citizenship attribute ‘developing an understanding and realising human rights’**. This would contribute to a ‘rights respecting’, rather than ‘responsibility respecting’ education.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY

Trócaire welcomes the principle of inclusive education and diversity. Diversity has multiple and inter-related forms. Diversity encompasses social class, family status, ability/disability, gender and sexual orientation, age, religion/no religion, race, ethnicity, home language. Diversity leads to complex identities. Many young people in Ireland are negotiating multiple and overlapping identities.

³ Fionnuala Waldron & Rowan Oberman (2016) Responsible citizens? How children are conceptualised as rights holders in Irish primary schools, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 20:6, 744-760

⁴ James Nickel, ‘Human Rights’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2014 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta.

Ethnic diversity is increasing rapidly in Ireland. **Trócaire would like to see a specific focus on ethnic diversity** come through stronger in the framework. The education sector has been at the vanguard of responses to ethnic diversity. This partially due to demographics (young people form the most ethnically diverse segment of Irish society⁵) and partially due to the recognition that education is a powerful tool for shaping social perceptions. Since 2005, the DES, NCCA and DCYA have promoted Intercultural Education as ‘one of the key responses to the changing shape of Irish society and to the existence of racism and discriminatory attitudes in Ireland’.⁶ DES defines two focal points for Intercultural Education:

- It is education which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all parts of human life. It sensitises the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches us all.
- It is education which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination and promotes the values upon which equality is built.⁷

DES, NCCA and DCYA have produced a range of guidelines for Intercultural Education and for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion and would like to see these coming through stronger in the framework. These include *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Enabling children to respect and celebrate diversity, to promote equality and to challenge unfair discrimination* (NCCA: 2005), *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School* (NCCA: 2006), and *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care* (DCYA, 2016).

⁵ See 2016 census, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8e/>

⁶ *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Enabling children to respect and celebrate diversity, to promote equality and to challenge unfair discrimination* (NCCA: 2005), 3

⁷ *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* (NCCA: 2005), 3

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be broad and balanced in purpose and content.
- Be structured in five broad curriculum areas;
 - Language
 - Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
 - Wellbeing
 - Social and Environmental Education
 - Arts Education.

(In addition to the five areas above, the Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to the child's holistic development particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective and in the process, underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. These areas connect to the themes of *Aistear* and to the subject-based work in Junior Cycle.)

- Provide for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 (junior Infants – second Class) and more subject-based learning in Stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class).
- Use broad learning outcomes to describe the expected learning and development for children.
- Incorporate the new *Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Promote high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Conceptualise assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning.

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- Highlight the importance of teachers’ professional judgement in supporting progression in children’s learning.
- Encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children’s interests and experiences.
- Recognise the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children’s learning.
- Recognise the role and influence of parents and families in children’s education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities.

The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

- Enhanced enjoyment of learning for children.
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children’s learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to

challenges and changing needs and priorities. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

Active learning was a core aspect of the 1999 curriculum. Trócaire would like to see this as the key approach to learning in the new framework. Special efforts will need to be made to ensure COVID restrictions do not result in the loss of the positive progression made in this area. Government guidelines currently prohibit many active learning strategies. If we are not careful, the movement away from active learning could be normalised in classrooms. Therefore, Trócaire suggests highlighting active learning more in the framework.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.