

# 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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

### *Individual submission details*

<b>Name</b>	
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### *Organisation submission details*

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**Yes**

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

The Dance in Education Working Group was established in order to respond to the proposed status of dance in the *2020 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. The working group is committed to dance being part of young people's education in Ireland. It is made up of members of the Irish professional dance sector with expert pedagogic and educational experience who work extensively within Irish education. Please see the members list below (attached).

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](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

# Section 1

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

Clearly the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework has emerged out of an extensive phase of consultation with stakeholders in Irish education. An evidence based approach in its development takes into account international advances and research to ensure that the Department of Education's mission is achieved; 'in facilitating individuals through learning to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development'. The aspirations of the DPCF are impressive and laudable. Much will depend on how these aspirations might be achieved within the acknowledged restraints on time and the demands of the curriculum on teachers. The Dance in Education Working Group recognises the essential nature of this curriculum development process in contributing to what education should provide and offer to support children and young people's learning and development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our prime concern is regarding the designation of dance as an "e.g." under Arts Education. In the 1999 primary school curriculum dance is a required strand of the Physical Education syllabus. In the Draft Framework document, it appears that dance has been allocated a precarious place as an "e.g.". Following consultation with numerous national dance organisations, pedagogues and artists with vested interests we feel that the value and contribution of dance to the education of young people and as an investment to the cultural landscape of Ireland needs to be given much further consideration. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* states 'that broad-ranging experiences in the arts including visual arts, music, drama, dance, film and digital media play a valuable role in children's experience of childhood...' We strongly support this statement but remain concerned that dance be accorded its due import with this broad range of experiences. Dance should have equal status alongside other art forms such as music, visual art and drama in an Irish primary education curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This Draft Framework should provide a solid basis for policy alignment between Irish Arts and Education stakeholders. We vehemently believe that Dance needs to be placed as a core subject under Arts Education in the redeveloped primary curriculum, a position justified and supported by national Arts in Education policy documentation and frameworks. As outlined in the *Making Great Art Work Dance Policy and Strategy 2018*, by the Arts Council, in the area of Young People, Children and Education the Arts Council promises to, 'advocate in partnership with the dance sector for the removal of dance from the Physical Education Curriculum to establish it as a separate subject of study.' Young people's access to dance education in the Irish primary education system suffers

from an historic, systemic lack of provision and support. This piecemeal provision of dance education does not 'take account the contemporary notions of educational quality and cultural entitlement' (Dr J. Coolahan, *The Changing Context of the Arts in Irish Education, Points of Alignment Report 2010*).

The change of status of dance from under Physical Education in the 1999 Primary Curriculum to a subject under Arts Education is hugely positive, so long as dance is accorded parity with music, drama and visual art. We note that detailed planning on resources, structures and processes is yet to take place and identify the need for the NCCA and other education stakeholders to engage with professional dance educators and organisations from within the dance sector during the process of the curriculum development.

## 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.**

We agree that the redeveloped curriculum should 'be for each and every child'. A child's right to participate in the arts and to an education in the arts is essential (see UN Rights of the Child which Ireland ratified in 1992 and the National Children's Strategy 2000). Our aim is that every child has access to a fundamental knowledge and understanding of dance and a continuity of progression in their educational lives. Current research shows that there are many barriers that inhibit children's enjoyment and engagement in cultural activities and learning experiences, particularly in dance. The report '*Arts and Cultural Participation among Children and Young People: Insights from Growing Up in Ireland*' by Dr Emer Smyth illustrates clearly that children in Ireland have vastly disparate levels of access to dance education due to socio economic backgrounds, the level of provision in schools and/or access to extracurricular activities.

We believe dance is for everyone and not just for those from a particular socioeconomic background or school. As stated by the Arts Council, 'Dance is an integral component of the Irish cultural landscape and one of the most widely practised artforms in Ireland [yet] it has been recognised that the lack of proper provision for dance education is a barrier to the development of the artform in Ireland' (*The Arts Council: An Integrated Dance Strategy 2010 – 2012*). The impact of 1999 curriculum and the lack of clarity in this Draft Framework to not name dance as a core subject under Arts Education demonstrates a poor appetite by the NCCA for dance education to 'be for every child'.

The undervalued status of dance as an art form within schools due to its position under

Physical Education in the 1999 curriculum has cultivated a culture in Irish primary and secondary education where dance is undervalued as an art form and under resourced. The historic neglect of dance education initiatives, resources and programmes has further garnered a distinct lack of understanding and appreciation of the value of dance within the Irish education system.

It is widely acknowledged that teachers lack confidence in teaching dance. This is partly due to the teacher's own limited experience of dance in their primary and second level education; there is also little opportunity in teacher education courses and Continued Professional Development (CPD) for practicing teachers.

This needs to be seriously reviewed especially if dance is to move under the Arts Education umbrella. Given that the BEd courses are already heavily laden with content we wonder how much time will be given to the broader arts education curriculum which now includes drama, dance, digital media and film. We acknowledge that the Arts Council funded Higher Education Institutions artist residences offered some support with this as is evidenced in the articles written by the dance residency coordinators at St. Pat's DCU, Froebel Dep. of Childhood and Primary Education at Maynooth University

'Further, with the launch of Creative Ireland Programme 2017- 2022 highlighting current policy emphasis on teacher-artist partnerships, experience of an arts residency locates an emerging teacher favourably to engage in such partnerships. By enhancing the quality of teacher preparation in dance, experience of an arts residency can equip him or her to invite artist(s)...into their classrooms to add another dimension/perspective to the class- room conversation and explorations in which children are already engaged' (Morrissey, 2013: 31). *Partnership is Key: Cultivating Facilitator-Artist Relationships in Teacher Education in Arts Council Dance Residencies* by Susan Marron, Physical Education Unit, School of Arts Education and Movement, Institute of Education, DCU and Dr Triona Stokes, Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

'The Arts Council's artist-in-residency programme at Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood has far exceeded all expectations. Thus far, the residency has assisted the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education in "dancing to life" on Maynooth University campus. Delivering to each of its stakeholders—student teachers; lecturing staff; partner schools and pupils, the residency has truly allowed for a unique engagement with dance.' Stokes, T. (2016) 'Dancing to Life: Reflections on the Experience of the Dance Artist-in-Residence at Maynooth University' in Mooney, B ed., *Education Matters, Yearbook 2015-2016*: Castleisland: Walsh Colour Print.

Giving increased flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling allows schools to allocate time to areas of priority. But much of the success will rest on the quality of guidelines and resources that are on offer based on the teacher's individual preferences and

knowledge as support in implementing areas of the arts that will require specialist knowledge, dance being a prime example.

Therefore, if every child is to have equal access to dance there needs to be:

- Adequate resources in place;
- An infrastructure of support in partnership with the professional sector;
- A firm national policy with an action based research dimension incorporated as an integral part of investment in dance education at primary school level;
- A development plan which includes strategies and structures for specialist artistic engagement by the professional dance sector within schools, through artist residencies, teaching and artistic programmes and projects and CPD for teachers and artists;
- Supported artist-teacher partnerships in a redeveloped curriculum alongside the promising work of the Creative Schools initiative and Teacher Artist Partnerships (TAP).

Without these considerations in place, we fear that dance will remain in a place of low priority with poor visibility. This will result in a continued culture of individuals with little insight into the value of their own bodies as vehicles for creative expression through everyday movement, the value of dance in empowering persons and communities to move and be moved in creative and personal ways and the capacity to appreciate public dance works by Irish and international dance artists and companies.

### **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.**

We are keen to see the links between the stages of a child's education clearly viewed as

part of an ongoing development of child as one who has a relationship with the arts as creator, participant and engaged ‘appreciator’.

Children have a right to have access to dance as part of their arts education on a continuum stretching from the *Aistear* years through primary, secondary and third level. There are discrepancies in the status of dance in Ireland in the curriculum connections between *Aistear*, primary, post-primary and 3<sup>rd</sup> level. For example, at Junior Cycle ‘dance and gymnastics’ is the title of an optional short course in strand 4 under Physical Education.

If dance is moved under Arts Education at primary level what impact does it have on pedagogical and assessment approaches and strategies relevant to physical education and artistic education competencies, skills and understanding?

We would like to consider in consultation with the NCCA how to develop a consistent approach to developing a vision for dance and access to dance in a young person’s formative years in the Irish education system.

In November 2020, Maureen Kennelly, Director of the Arts Council, stated, ‘For those who wish to go on to higher education in arts practices not fully catered for within the school curriculum, such as dance, what are the implications for their learning and development?’ We echo these concerns also. Dance is a viable profession in Ireland as evidenced through the Arts Council’s recognition of the art form and the existence of BA, MA and PhD programmes in Dance in Ireland’s 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions. (*See Reshaping the Landscape: A Pathway to Professional Dance Training of International Standing in Ireland*. The Arts Council Dance and Education Report, Dr Jenny Roche, June 2016)

The commitment and passion of this submission demonstrates a strong appetite from the dance sector to engage and look at ‘what dance is and what it can do in the Irish education system?’ Note member’s biographies attached for sample professional practitioners. The dance education and professional dance community would like to be engaged in more conversation around this with the NCCA. For example, there are proven methodologies from both the redeveloped Scottish, USA and New Zealand education curriculums that clearly demonstrate a way forward for dance in arts and education policy and procedural frameworks.

Dance can have an extremely positive impact on the life of young people, in the culture of our schools as creative and active places with engaged and motivated children, teachers and communities.

### **Emerging priorities for children’s learning**

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

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

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

The focus on developing skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes is of particular interest and worthy of praise as a stated aim. We would like to see more extensive exploration and analysis around how curriculum design, development and implementation might encompass the key named competencies in relation to subject learning and assessment. The focus given to the areas of creativity, communicating and fostering wellbeing in terms of the overall development of the child is of particular interest to the Dance in Education Working group.

As a result of our long standing concerns related to the fragile and fragmented inclusion of contemporary, traditional dance forms and creative dance frames and processes of responding, creating, performing and appreciating in primary education, we feel strongly that there is a need to invest substantial effort and resources into creating, and co-creating a vision and resources for dance with teachers.

As McGuinness states (2018) there needs to be sufficiently detailed descriptions of the meaning of each key competency so that teachers can know ‘what it looks like in their classrooms and how they (competencies) will manifest through subject and interdisciplinary practices.’

In addition to knowing ‘what it looks like’, teachers need experiential engagement with dance forms and artistic processes, working alongside dance education specialists both in formative teacher education and in CPD. Further evidence by Woods (2010) demonstrates the lack of consistency between the objectives of a curriculum and experiences in school. This report states that an ‘evaluation of how dance is been taught is warranted as there are discrepancies between the syllabus and what is actually taught during PE classes.’ Woods, C.B., Tannehill D., Quinlan, A., Moyna, N. and Walsh, J. (2010). *The Children’s Sport*

*Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA). Research Report No 1.* School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University and The Irish Sports Council, Dublin, Ireland.

As this report highlights, team games have tended to be favoured by teachers whilst activities such as dance or swimming were either not taught or provided infrequently. Regarding dance, one of the main reasons for this, according to this report, is that many teachers feel they do not have the confidence to teach and/or assess it.

With ‘creativity’ stated as one of the key competencies alongside the Creative Schools goal ‘to put arts and creativity into the heart of children and young people’s lives’, we would like to echo McGuinness’s concern that ‘the importance of shifting mind-sets about the images of teaching and learning (learner agency) implied by key competency development should not be underestimated’.

We completely understand the challenge in implementing a curriculum which embraces competency development at its heart. The professional dance sector wishes to support change and transformation through a co-creative process that builds sustainable models, resources and relationships through education and dance partnerships.

### **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).

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- 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.**

We believe that a continued exploration of integration at stages 3 and 4 is necessary despite the more subject-based approach. The arts are a non-literal way of looking at concepts and ideas and it would be desirable that a narrowing of focus on discrete subject areas did not result in a narrowing of approach.

As a physically expressive art form and activity, dance supports childhood cognitive and physical development by enabling learning through ‘doing’. Embracing the use of gesture and whole body action as a form of non-verbal language, dance offers a valuable and diverse mode of learning for children, and one that is sympathetic to more traditional educational methodologies. As such, dance validates the place of the mind *and* body and the dual role they play in educating the ‘whole child’.

In this respect, dance ought to be recognised both for its value as an area of study across all the curriculum subjects, and for its potential contribution as a core subject under Arts Education. If the area of Arts Education is to be ‘broad and balanced in purpose and content’, dance needs to be considered equal (at least) to music, drama, and the visual arts.

We wish to see a commitment to a curriculum development that values ecological wellbeing and sustainability at its heart. In connecting key competencies, dispositions, attitudes, skills and knowledge to children’s real lives, interdisciplinary themes such as environmental and ecological literacy can be made more explicit throughout this curriculum framework and design.

We agree wholeheartedly with Ken Robinson that curriculum practices and standards need to encourage and support the provision of forms of knowledge that encourage young people and school communities to engage with the global economic and cultural issues of sustainability and environmental well-being – to encourage them towards forms of economic, social, cultural and artistic activities that support the health and renewal of the world’s natural resources rather than to those that deplete and despoil them Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, *Creative Schools* 2015.

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

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

- Promote high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Conceptualise assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning.
- Highlight the importance of teachers’ professional judgement in supporting progression in children’s learning.
- Encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children’s interests and experiences.
- Recognise the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children’s learning.
- Recognise the role and influence of parents and families in children’s education.

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

Expecting primary school teachers to deliver a rich dance experience with little or no training or support is unrealistic.

1. We strongly advocate for the development of dance specialised training in teacher education.
2. We strongly advocate for the development of ‘*dance education specialisation*’ in Dance third level courses in Ireland.

Developing a structure and model of high quality engagement between the dance professional sector and primary education system is of high priority. Developing consistency of engagement in teacher education contexts, an increased awareness of the value of dance and a deepening of practices and artist/ teacher engagements in primary schools across Ireland is absolutely needed and warranted now.

We are mindful of the resources required, such as

- Access to appropriate working space (i.e. school hall) if dance is moved under Arts

Education and out of Physical Education;

- Continued Teacher CPD,
- Continued artist CPD,
- Artist residencies in teacher education and in schools,
- Dance programmes led by specialists
- Resources to support in class teaching.

We hope that the stated aim of ‘*enabling schools to engage with local, national and international initiatives and opportunities*’, would incorporate the use of dance specialists’ expertise. In some measure this is already beginning to happen in Ireland through the Creative Schools, TAP and artist residency initiatives.

The low visibility and historical lowly status of dance in schools and in teacher education continues to place dance at a serious disadvantage. Indeed, the children and teachers and artists who need and value their bodies as intelligent, kinaesthetic and intuitive moving, personal instruments of knowledge and communication are being disserved in a curriculum that does not fully appreciate and value dance as both a process and form of physical and artistic development and knowledge.

### **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*.

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**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.**

We welcome the assurances that the very real problem of curriculum overload will be addressed. In the 1999 curriculum the time allocation for arts education was 8 hours but the maximum accorded arts in the proposed curriculum is 10 hours with the addition of three arts subjects, namely dance, digital media and film.

We believe that dance will suffer as a result. We reiterate our aim that every child should have access to a fundamental knowledge and understanding of dance, which continues and develops throughout their educational lives. Dance has the potential to enhance the quality of experience not only in the areas of education, but in healthcare, wellness, community cohesion and shared human expression.

#### **Data Protection**

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**Thank you for your submission.**

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