



**NCCA**

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



# 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>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

### *Organisation submission details*

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<b>Position</b>	Education Director
<b>Organisation</b>	Fighting Words
<b>Date</b>	22 February 2022
<b>E-mail</b>	

The NCCA will publish written submissions received during the consultation. The submissions will include the author's/contributor's name/organisation. Do you consent to this submission being posted online?

Yes

No

Please email your submission to [PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie](mailto:PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie)

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

Fighting Words was established in 2009 to provide creative writing experiences for children of all ages. The programme operates from 20 centres countrywide, and is running with schools at all levels, providing over 50,000 students with free mentoring and publishing supports annually. To date Fighting Words has provided free creative writing experiences to over 500,000 school children in Ireland. The organisation has trained and vetted 2,500 volunteer tutors to deliver the workshops.

Fighting Words have a formal link with the Institute of Education in Dublin City University since 2018, focussed on teacher education and research on creative methodologies, supported by the Department of Education. Fighting Words is also operating with schools in Northern Ireland from a base in East Belfast, and with a teacher education programme in Queens University Belfast and Stranmillis University College.

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.

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# Section 1

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

*Overall, the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework presents a strong, exciting, and timely set of directions for the curriculum at primary level. The focus on competencies, increased flexibility and revised proposals related to time and subjects are all positive.*

*Fighting Words uses creative writing as an entry point with students, where creativity and creative approaches enable the children to generate new ideas, opportunities and experiences. Creative writing functions as a means and a methodology that can be applied to any subject, with every age-level, and with children of all abilities. In addition to the benefits in terms of literacy and numeracy, Fighting Words has recorded the impact and benefit for children in terms of self-confidence, self-efficacy, wellbeing, and resilience.*

*Teachers recognise the positive elements of a creative learning approach, and many who are engaged with Fighting Words indicate a preference for the use of creative approaches in the classroom. These facilitative and collaborative methodologies are underscored in the NCCA's Draft Primary Curriculum Framework.*

*The challenges teachers reference in their collaboration with Fighting Words should be noted and will need to be addressed if the proposed directions are to be fully realised. In recent research conducted by Fighting Words 77% of the 120 responding teachers indicated that there is a curriculum gap in relation to creative writing. While there is reference to creative writing in the language curriculum, the frame is limited and defined only in the context of language outcomes. While language is a natural home for creative writing, it is equally valuable across all subjects and as a tool for integrated learning. This lack of emphasis on creative writing can be corrected with this new Primary Curriculum Framework. The interdependency of creative learning with all other elements of the curriculum is emphasised rightly in the draft framework, and with this there is scope for a broader and more appropriate emphasis on creative writing across all genres.*

*Other challenges referenced include time, and here the increased flexibility proposed will provide teachers with valuable scope. Teachers will need this curriculum flexibility, and managerial support required to ensure that the collaborative and facilitative approaches can be used in their classrooms as proposed.*

*Space can also be an issue according to teachers, where working in circles, or in less formal settings such as sitting on bean bags, or using open spaces, or visiting local amenities or arts centres, are approaches that will need to be used more frequently to deliver on the shift proposed.*

*The facilitation skills required to oversee the collaborative learning approach proposed as part of the new draft framework will be new to many teachers. According to teachers contributing to the recent Fighting Words research, this lack of experience or confidence in using creative approaches is a challenge for some teacher. Teachers indicate that they are not necessarily getting the experience or acquiring facilitation skills in teacher education. In the Fighting Words survey of 120 teachers conducted in 2021, this is seen as a gap, with 95% of respondents indicating that*

*teacher education could be better structured to prepare teachers to use participative facilitation skills more confidently.*

## 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.**

*This direction is a strength in the Draft Primary School Curriculum Framework. The emphasis on scope and flexibility to enable the agency of teachers, to adapt to the local reality for the school, and to empower the students, is welcomed. The latitude provided to teachers determines their scope to use more innovative and creative approaches with students.*

*The overall shift to a competencies based and opportunity-oriented approach, has real potential to increase the use of participative, engaging approaches with the result beneficial outcomes for learners.*

*A challenge here will be the increased expectation on the schools that are already finding it harder to operate in this more responsive and adaptable way. Factors such as resource, the school community, management, staff capabilities and experience will all impact on the capacity of a school to deliver on more innovative curriculum changes. All schools will need to be supported fully to realise these messages on agency and flexibility, and that will mean significant and proportionate funding to schools depending on needs.*

*The important emphasis in the Draft Framework on pedagogical strategies that are open-ended, creative and engaging, is crucial to the fulfilment of this curriculum direction. Pedagogy determines how the children are supported in the school and the educational experiences they have. The welcome emphasis on showcasing pedagogies that are respectful, accommodating and that promote curiosity, imagination, and agency, is central to the quest for flexibility and agency in our schools. We will need to ensure that teachers and student teachers are equipped with the experience, understanding and skills required to relate with children through these open-ended learning experience. This will require a shift.*

### **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.**

*The proposed continuous and interconnected framework is excellent, and clearly builds on the strategy being advanced by the NCCA and education partners. A seamless progression along their education journey will enhance the enjoyment and quality of learning for students.*

*While our remit here for this consultation is curricular, it is important to say that this curriculum message will need to be matched with a similar commitment to the resource and policy needed to ensure consistency and alignment across all elements of the education system. School management and governance, school plans and policies, teacher education (including early years), resourcing and structures, will all impact on the capacity of a school to contribute to this curriculum message.*

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

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*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.
- 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 seven key competencies proposed and the related attributes, are strong, and the consistent recommitment to the same competencies at all levels of the curriculum is important. The emphasis on the interdependence and integration of the seven competencies, both in the graphic and the point that these are ‘inextricably linked’ and ‘embedded across all curriculum areas and subjects’ is fundamental.***

*It is important to note that this direction places a welcome and much stronger emphasis on experiential learning in the primary school curriculum. Educational experiences, school-based relationships, the learning environment and school culture, are some of vital elements that will determine the success of the competencies based approach. Equipping teachers and schools to understand and respond to this approach is essential.*

*Creative and inclusive learning processes, with democratic and participative approaches, are necessary to achieve the proposed Framework. It would be important then to see an increased emphasis on this in all aspects of the education system – teacher education, school planning, school management, etc.*

## 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.**

*Curriculum structure, including around subject areas and time blocks, is necessary, and the structure proposed is acceptable, responding to the identified needs.*

*Certainly, the increased and very visible emphasis on wellbeing is a welcome evolution in subject structure and time allocation. As we know the recent research indicated increasing levels of bullying in our schools, and there is evidence of the growing challenges young people are experiencing with mental health, and wellbeing.*

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*However, in terms of the real learning, experiences, and outcomes for children, the subject structure won't be the defining and important element. It will be the changes in school culture, education strategy and policy that will determine the new curriculum framework.*

*It would be important for the NCCA to present the new curriculum framework in ensures that the cross-cutting drivers, the competencies and approaches and methodologies, are dominant in terms of how the curriculum is visualised, understood and implemented, rather than the more structured subject and time lenses.*

*Creative writing is an approach and methodology that fits with the vision and direction laid out, and there is ample scope to see creative education and creativity emphasised in the detailed curriculum materials that will be developed for all subjects and areas. When the subject-by-subject approach is used, there is always the risk that we will lose some of the commitment to integration that is so valuable in the draft framework.*

### **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.**

There is a challenge where the refreshing emphasis on flexibility, and participative learning, together with an emphasis on competencies, is not conducive to more structured assessment techniques. Evaluation processes will need to be equally flexible and participative, and resultantly will be more time-consuming. For example, it is important to note that competencies in the areas of creativity and innovation, listening and understanding, or active citizenship as examples, will involve pedagogical processes that could be assessed using more subjective and collective techniques. There is a risk that more formal measurement using traditional assessment techniques, which fit more with subjects like language or STEM, could dominate the assessment paradigm and undermine the overall commitment to integration in the draft framework.

**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.

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

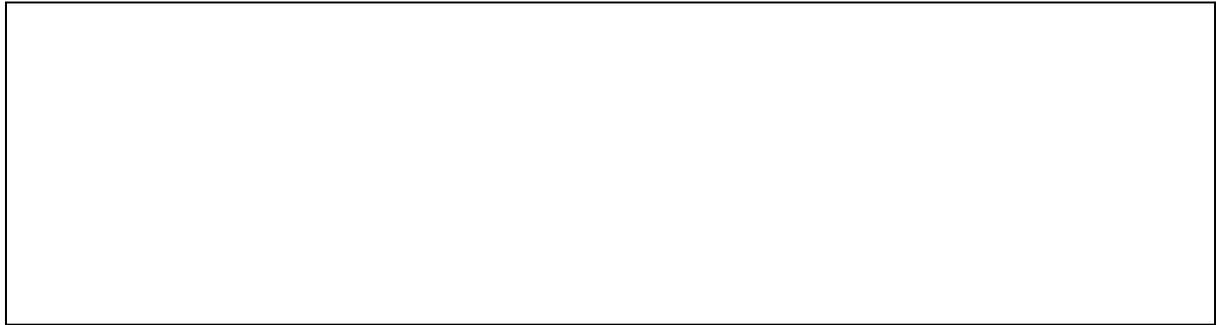
- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children’s learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

**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.**

*Consistency is important, and there is much that is good in the 1999 curriculum. The approach being used by the NCCA regarding the transition to a new curriculum framework for primary school seems appropriate. There are defining shifts, such as the emphasis on collaborative teaching approaches, the focus on wellbeing, the shift in emphasis towards STEM and modern languages. These are all important and are evolving from the 1999 framework. They are step change rather than radical changes but changes nonetheless that should be noted and communicated as teachers become equipped to follow these changes and deliver them in the classroom. It is important to ensure the new elements of the curriculum are visible and clear for all. Notably for *Fighting Words*, there needs to be much greater space and visibility for creative writing as an element of the new framework, not only in relation to the arts and language, but as a toolbox for learning and expression across all subject areas, including wellbeing.*

### **Covid-19**

**Since the publication of the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*, Covid-19 has presented a big challenge for schools. Please give your views on the implications of schools’ experience of the pandemic for the finalisation of the *Primary Curriculum Framework*.**



### **Data Protection**

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit [www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement](http://www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement) or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at [dpo@ncca.ie](mailto:dpo@ncca.ie).

**Thank you for your submission.**

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