

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

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

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Date	14 th March 2022
E-mail	

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

Recently Irish Aid sought proposals for a Strategic Partnership for the cohesive and strategic delivery of a 20 month programme for Global Citizen Education at primary level. The Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN), the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), the Dublin City University Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education (DCU) and Trócaire formed a consortium (with a working title of "G.C.E. Primary") and made a successful bid for the strategic partnership and are now working to develop a comprehensive plan for the delivery of Global Citizen Education in Irish primary schools.

Global Citizen Education (GCE) is about supporting primary school pupils in becoming active global citizens through building their knowledge & understanding, skills, appreciation of values and attitudes, and awareness of opportunities to become active global citizens. It is delivered with an appreciation for the increasingly diverse nature of Irish classrooms as well as the diverse nature of education settings. The consortium sees the current request for submissions from NCCA towards development of a revised Curriculum as an opportunity to highlight the importance of GCE being reflected in the curriculum and specifically under the 'Being an Active Citizen' competency. GCE should be specifically referenced under the Wellbeing and/or Social and Environmental Education subject area sections of the revised curriculum.

We in GCE-Primary have agreed with Irish Aid, our strategic partner, a Programme Goal whereby primary school pupils are supported to become active global citizens committed to building a fairer and more sustainable world and our agreed Programme Outcome is increased reach, quality, accessibility and effectiveness of G.C.E. in the primary education sector in Ireland.

GCE Primary, as a single focus consortium of four primary school experienced organisations, recognise the complexity involved in developing a curriculum suitable to the needs of the next generation of children in our primary schools. We will play our part in supporting NCCA in helping to develop toolkits or in any other way we can towards the provision of a comprehensive and cohesive plan for GCE across the Irish primary school curriculum.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), through the Irish Aid programme, is also committed to ongoing support for Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and targeting learners of all ages in Ireland. Ireland's policy for international development *A Better World* states that fostering global citizenship will be a core component of implementing the policy and commits to dedicating more resources to implementing development education programmes. GCE contributes to the realisation of Irish Aid's vision for a sustainable and just world, by providing an opportunity for people in Ireland to reflect on their roles and responsibilities as global citizens and by encouraging people to take action for a fairer and more sustainable future for all.

Irish Aid's new Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025 aims to help build a broader sense of global citizenship in Ireland, encouraging public engagement with **issues such as climate change, hunger, peace, global inequality and injustice**. The strategy supports education programmes in both the formal and non-formal sectors. As a strategic partner of Irish Aid we endorse that policy position.

Teachers require structure in planning. Targeted supports in a clearly structured curriculum facilitate both direct and cross-curricular planning and teaching. The agency and creativity of individual teachers and whole school staff are thus nurtured.

Our consortium's strategy outlines our plans to network with other key Government Departments, private sector and civic society organisations and agencies to ensure a coherent approach to GCE at primary school level.

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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*.

Our considered view of the Draft Curriculum Framework is that it is excellent in general. We wholeheartedly and fully endorse the Vision, Principles and Key Competencies of the draft primary curriculum framework but we have particular concerns with the 'Curriculum Areas and Subjects' section on pages 11 to 14.

We have particular concerns about GCE Learning Outcomes and where and how in the subject toolkits GCE will be contained as a subject sub-strand unit in its own right.

Our concerns specifically relate to:

Whether GCE will be named as "essential learning" in Table 3, Section 4, Page 12.

Will there be "Learning Outcomes" developed for G.C.E. in Table 3, Section 5, Page 12 and

How, in the subject toolkits to be developed, will GCE will be contained as a subject strand/unit in its own right beyond, for example, a vague reference / possibility of fitting in a GCE lesson in the "Myself and the Wider World" strand unit of Geography in the 1999 curriculum.

It is our deeply considered view that Global Citizenship Education should be named in its own right and be timetabled accordingly. Our concern is that Global Citizenship Education could be left in the realm of "an optional cross-curricular curriculum strand element". "Figure 3" on page 11 and Sections 4, 5 and 6 of Table 3 on Page 12 and the 'brief outlines of Curriculum areas' on page 13 & 14 are very broad, non-specific and may appear to allow for vagueness in implementation from teacher to teacher and from school to school and that the professional balance required for teachers and Principals between agency, flexibility and curriculum subjects structure is not explicit and in our particular area, the naming of Global Citizenship Education is missing.

The Minister of Education, Norma Foley, in her address to the Dept. of Education ESD Forum in Feb 2022, stated that she was delighted to see that it was E.S.D. policy to have Global Citizenship Education embedded across all curricula and we fully agree with the Minister and with the E.S.D. policy what we term "the mainstreaming of Global Citizenship Education".

We believe that the ultimate success of the new primary curriculum will have the following 3 points addressed, in a teacher friendly way, both in the planning and the implementation stages:

- i. Agreed principles, key competencies and a solid structure in which a primary teacher preparing a yearly or shorter term plan can thrive with professional agency, flexibility and creativity.
- ii. Quality resources and toolkits and
- iii. Supportive management, inspectorate, parental and teacher representatives.

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.

GCE-Primary welcomes the increased opportunities for agency and flexibility in curriculum delivery. The strengths and interests of individual teachers and school staff can therefore be maximised. It is an excellent opportunity to address GCE in their practice, as they teach the key competency of 'Being an Active Citizen'. The redeveloped curriculum will 'Be for Every Child'. This is an important aspect of GCE, and can build on the work of the Intercultural Education Guidelines already published for schools by the NCCA. Every child should see themselves and their home lives reflected in the curriculum in a respectful and meaningful way and learn about the lives of others too so that they can understand the interconnectedness of the world around them. The draft framework highlights that learning about others enables children to develop empathy.

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.

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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.

GCE features in the Aistear framework, particularly in the Theme of Identity and Belonging. This shows that young children are able to learn about global issues and their identity and the identity of others in an age-appropriate way. The Junior Cycle includes a focus on wellbeing, equality and sustainability and GCE is evident in the Statements of Learning. It is significant to note that GCE related themes are also allocated extensive time and prominence up to leaving Cert level through the subject 'Politics and Society'. Even though GCE is not mentioned specifically in the 1999 Primary School Curriculum, there is scope for it to be taught across the curriculum via SPHE, SESE, English and Religious and Ethical Education subjects and it is taught in many of the 3,000+ primary schools at present to varying degrees. GCE-Primary would welcome its explicit inclusion in this framework to enable all children to build on what they have learned in pre-school settings and to prepare them for what they will learn at post-primary.

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.
- 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.

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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.

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Children are interested in learning about the world around them and have an innate sense of justice and fairness. The Draft Primary Curriculum facilitates cross-curricular and cross key competencies integrated teaching and learning. We believe that children of all ages can engage in age-appropriate learning about issues from the personal to the local and on to global issues. Justice, equality and sustainability issues along with values education are a part of GCE and need to be planned for in a child appropriate fashion and are necessary for the world we now live in. Currently, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in the Ukraine are issues which children hear about on a daily basis, can be concerned about and are appropriate issues for teachers to sensitively discuss in class as part of GCE. Therefore, professionally produced teacher friendly GCE toolkits for meaningful integration of GCE in curriculum areas and specific GCE classes will be very important. We recommend a suite of resources/toolkits for primary schools. Support for teachers to teach about global citizenship directly and as part of cross subject areas teaching and learning is also recommended to establish the global aspect of active citizenship.

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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.

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(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.

Primary school teachers all need to produce Annual Plans and Short-term Plans and are required to complete Monthly Reports, all of which are related to the Learning Outcomes specified in the primary curriculum. Agency and Flexibility for teachers and schools is vitally important, but can only be implemented successfully where there is a clear overall structure. This will be central to the success of the new curriculum. The success of a curriculum will therefore be dependent upon overall achievable and realistic learning outcomes and professional and teacher friendly toolkits to support learning within the framework of the proposed revised primary school curriculum. We have specific concerns around the quality of “Learning Outcomes” as experienced so far in some schools and the vagueness of the section on “Toolkits” in Table 3 (Page 11). It is wonderful for teachers and schools to have agency and flexibility but they also require solid structures in which their professionalism, creativity and flexibility can flourish in tandem and in a balanced manner where every subject on the curriculum gets sufficient space and attention to be properly and adequately covered. Flexibility in how timetables operate with the possibility of teachers allocating time to subjects on a monthly basis is most welcome and will prove very useful in certain subjects including the arts and music. The flexible timetabling arrangements would also benefit G.C.E. whereby a project could be carried out over a few consecutive days in a month without the necessity to allocate time on a weekly basis. GCE also offers unique cross-curricular opportunities but still requires a specified position in the curriculum as previously outlined.(ref Page 12, Figure 3)

Where would G.C.E. fit in as a named subject sub-strand / element?

We note on page 11 that the curriculum areas are: Language, Maths, Science & Technology, Wellbeing, Arts Education*, Social and Environmental Education and the Patrons Programme. GCE should be integrated across all the curriculum areas and one might assume that if GCE was a named curriculum subject strand element it would sit either under the “Wellbeing” as already outlined or

the “Social & Environmental” umbrella. Indeed, it could come under “Wellbeing” for junior classes and under “Social and Environmental” at senior level. However GCE fits naturally with Physical Education, Health Education, Mental Health Education, Wellbeing, RSE, Anti-bullying, Intercultural Education and Anti-racist education. We are concerned that “Social and Environmental Education” appears to morph into “History and Geography” in the senior section of the primary school curriculum without detail. Recent global events tell us that G.C.E. needs to be given much greater prominence. We strongly agree with the Department of Education’s NCCA overseeing the production of high quality exemplars and toolkits. It has been almost a quarter of a century since our primary curriculum has been changed. In that relatively short time, our world has changed beyond recognition. **This curriculum needs to reflect these seismic changes.** GCE is a subject area through which the changes and serious challenges facing our world can most naturally be addressed and key learnings can be brought about in the school context.

Global citizenship education, incorporating as it does Human Rights Education, Justice, Equality and Sustainability Education, needs to be clearly named and given its due prominence in this new curriculum. **As we approach the 2nd quarter of the 21st Century, it behoves us to use the transformative power of education to support children to engage with the real world around them and enable them to respond to major issues and inequalities evident in our society and across the world.** *This revised curriculum has the potential to be a genuine world leader and offers us here in Ireland the chance to lead the world of primary school curriculum development in a manner fit for the unique challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century.*

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.

Assessment is a key component in informing schools and teachers what children know, what they would like to know and what approach we should take to supporting the learning in a practical and sustainable way.

Assessment is integral to high-quality teaching and learning across the curriculum areas and subjects, and goes far beyond activities that contribute to external accountability and national monitoring. (NCCA Guidelines).

Assessment in the GCE area would be less formal or standardised, and more in the area of self-assessment, informed by teacher and parent intuition with children’s contributions central to the process. Assessment would involve posing appropriate questions to scaffold learning for example.

Assessment of GCE at primary level, will fall most often into the ‘planned interactions’ space with asking children to construct concept maps to communicate their current understanding of a topic, conferencing with a child about a piece of work, or completing and reporting on individual or collaborative school projects. More formalised assessment will involve teacher-set tasks and tests and how they are marked.

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.

The 1999 curriculum is an excellent basis for moving on. It copper-fastened the child being at the centre of the curriculum and now GCE can enable educators to choose pedagogical approaches that make meaningful connections with children's interests and experiences. Children are aware of global issues in the world now. They see and hear about them at home, in the media, from their peers, etc. Primary school aged children are exposed to issues of Justice, Equality and Sustainability on a regular basis from a variety of sources. These topics may be of genuine interest to many children but they also have the potential to cause a sense of anxiety and helplessness in learners. The rapid development of the war in Ukraine along with the media coverage of the suffering of the innocent and the spread of Covid-19 are recent examples of this. The action-based approach of GCE can help to address this. Recent statistics are clear and unambiguous about the benefits of dealing with issues openly rather than ignoring or avoiding them as regards the mental health and wellbeing of people.

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*.

Bearing in mind the timelines set out for the design and implementation of the new curriculum, it would be foolhardy not to take into account the devastating effect on school communities of Covid-19. Normal school life is only now resuming after two years of unprecedented difficulty, disruption and challenge not previously experienced by schools. Primary schools and whole school communities have been marvellous in how they have responded to the difficulties,

including the times when teaching and learning were being carried out remotely. The whole experience has come with some cost however, particularly to the mental health of children, their parents, school staff and leaders. As we put the finishing touches to this submission, Covid-19 is still rife in our school communities. For these reasons we would encourage the NCCA to revisit expectations around the delivery of the New Curriculum and allow the primary school sector the chance to recalibrate procedures and relationships so vital to the efficient running of our schools. As an example of this we recommend no new initiatives in school before September 2022. However, we do encourage more research and consultation into where and how Global Citizenship Education sits in the New Curriculum and our G.C.E. Primary consortium would be delighted to be of assistance in that field.

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 or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.

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Thank you for your submission.

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