

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

Name	John Curtis
Position	General Secretary
Organisation	Joint Managerial Body
Date	27 th January 2021
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 email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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

The Joint Managerial Body (JMB) was founded in 1964 to represent the interests of all voluntary secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland. It is the main decision-making and negotiating body for the management authorities of almost 380 voluntary secondary schools. The JMB comprises two founding organisations: AMCSS, the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools and the ISA, the Irish School Heads' Association, representing the Protestant Schools in the State.

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 Joint Managerial Body/Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (JMB/AMCSS) welcomes the development by the NCCA of this new draft Primary Curriculum Framework and is grateful for this opportunity to present a submission.

The emergence of this new draft Primary Curriculum Framework is very timely, not alone in its intentional replacing of the 1999 curriculum which was in need of an in-depth review, but also accidentally in terms of the 'learnings' that have surfaced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Among these is a re-evaluation of the value of education, the notion of teachers as key workers essential to the health and sustainability of society and, of course, an explosion in the requirement for flexibility across all levels of the educational enterprise.

It is in this last point that we feel the new Framework will have its greatest impact i.e. its being a Framework, as opposed to the classic top-down, content-driven and universal prescription our system has been labouring under since at least the 19th century.

Indeed, within our own bailiwick of post-primary education, the emergence of a framework for junior cycle and the current review and consultation process aimed at achieving a framework for senior cycle means that from early childhood to post senior cycle progression, students will have experienced a high quality, yet locally nuanced education designed both centrally and locally to best serve their needs in terms of both their experience of schooling and its outcomes. This represents a hugely significant achievement for the NCCA, policymakers and practitioners alike, and JMB commends the extensive, and often hidden, work underpinning the emergence of this draft.

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.

The emergence of a finalised and agreed-upon framework for junior cycle was characterised by a difficult relationship backdrop, particularly between the Department and teacher unions. Indeed, there are core issues yet to be resolved some six years after the 2015 framework was published. While such difficulties could be framed as industrial relations matters, the reported experience of educators was that the policymakers were 'trying to teacher-proof' the curriculum.

No-one believes this was intentional but the experience of exclusion from core decision-making, accidental or otherwise, is a make-or-break issue in the change agenda. This concern for authentic collaboration goes to the heart of teacher agency in the change process:

'Teachers can sabotage attempts at change and such attempts can only work when teachers understand, accept and then become committed to the underlying principles behind the changes' (A.V. Kelly (2009) *The Curriculum – Theory and Practice*)

Indeed, stakeholder omission is not just a DES-Union issue. The exclusion of management bodies from a place at the junior cycle reform decision-making table (as opposed to the consultation table) has left a legacy of unresolved, critical issues in the junior cycle story that the primary development process should well be informed-by.

In particular, the politicisation of education is now obvious to all, and care must be taken to ensure that it is the policymaker, educational professional and pedagogy theorist voice that provides the impetus for change, and not the populist and transient voice of the politician.

The 'no child left behind' agenda is, of course, what every mature society and educational system should aspire-to. It will, however, remain an aspiration if teachers are not empowered and freed-up to differentiate their teaching and assessment roles in a setting that supports diverse approaches. That setting is not just physical or resource-driven, it will require deft leadership at school principal and Board levels to establish an emotionally safe school culture that encourages and affirms educational enterprise, experimentation and even risk-taking, on the part of its teachers. Such rich school cultural awareness will also be demanded of the Inspectorate.

Finally, and again to paraphrase Kelly, we must convince teachers of the importance of developing a theoretical underpinning to their work – bridging the gap between theory and practice. They will require a sound theoretical reflection on practice as a defence against the imposition on them of policies framed by amateurs who are in no position to exercise it effectively.

If, under the framework model, there is now an emerging centrality of independence of judgement for teachers, it must be founded on sound theoretical understandings of contemporary insights into pedagogy and process. School staffrooms have always been home to conversations and sharing of craft knowledge. We must now install teacher bookshelves and libraries; provide access to relevant literature online and otherwise; encourage staff-wide education book-clubs; see and hear our principals and deputies referring to theory as a matter of course, and most importantly, make every classroom a crucible of action research on the part of the teacher.

Anything else is tinkering.

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 explicit bridging with pre and post primary schooling in the draft framework is most welcome as both in pedagogical and anthropological terms, the phase-change from 6th class to 1st year in particular has hitherto been more of a collision than a smooth progression.

That said, it would be hoped that such connections in terms of curricular frameworking might lead to greater professional exchange and understanding between primary and post primary educators. Efforts to reduce the effects of sectoral siloing could exploit the freedom opening up to primary schools under the new framework for joint project-type work with their local post primary school; subject resource sharing; digital connections between schools of both sectors; student peer mentoring; reciprocal school visits and, most importantly, in-person professional engagement between primary and post primary teachers.

As noted in the draft, such transitions require to be supported with the sharing of relevant information between schools of different phases. Post primary schools could perhaps be better supported in terms of guidance on the sharing, dissemination and use of such information as travels in the Education Passport, particularly where additional educational needs are identified.

Linkage between the key skills/competencies embedded in the draft framework with their equivalents at junior cycle is particularly welcome.

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.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

- 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 education enterprise, particularly at classroom level, involves a constant reframing of priorities, and the very essence of a framework model of curricular specification and delivery offers important latitude for teachers in their decision-making. There is no reason why, for example, a child in Killybegs should have an identical curricular experience to another from Kilmainham, yet the challenge remains to ensure a successful connection with the often quite different experience and demands of the post primary setting. In particular, the challenges of both the mathematics and Gaeilge junior cycle specifications require a high degree of readiness on the part of the incoming student, though it must be noted that in many cases, new first years actually ‘power-down’ while their new teachers ensure everyone is on the same page, so to speak.

That said, the embedding of a metacognitive aspect to the draft primary framework in terms of ‘learning-to-learn’ will pay significant dividends as its equivalent at junior cycle was intended to serve students well in their transition to senior cycle.

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

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

- 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.

The journey from a narrowly defined, ‘top-down’ mandated curriculum to a more broadly structured specification and learning outcomes approach makes significant demands on educators which will require time and support to manifest. The change of focus from teacher inputs to student outcomes is a more radical philosophical shift that may appear at first sight and its adoption at junior cycle has not been unproblematic. While NCCA does not carry an implementation role, it does strongly inform the teacher-developers who will ultimately provide the necessary CPD, and, as with the JCT enterprise, all concerned should expect that this will emerge as much an unlearning journey, as a learning one. Similarly, the anxieties of parents who are concerned about rigour, content and readiness for post-primary, will mirror those of junior cycle students’ families in worrying about readiness for leaving certificate programmes. In this, we return to the need for teachers to claim their own professional authority here; to be supported in the reawakening of their own agency and to have positive buy-in from both their schools leaders and their trade union.

In the long-term, the inclusive and consultative approach taken by NCCA in the development of this draft augurs well for an energised ownership of this hugely significant development and many of the ‘learnings’ from the ongoing review of junior cycle being undertaken by UL should inform the roll-out of these developments at primary.

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.

Children report missing their teachers as much as their friends during recent school closures – a very high compliment indeed! Our primary educators need no lectures on enterprise, professional agility, child-centred approaches or moral agency, and, to a large extent, the emergence of ‘new’ pedagogies and assessment approaches will be far less of an innovation than a neutral outside commentator might expect. The mission, to some extent, lies in making the tacit more explicit and in sharing insights and good practice across the school community and beyond. The parallel intra-school and inter-school strategy adopted by JCT in its professional development work on junior cycle pays off on all fronts, as good practice is caught as much as its taught.

The aspirations to incorporate children’s interests and family influences will demand a certain ‘slackness’ in terms of curricular overload. A continual reframing of learning priorities will demand not just high levels of professional judgement, but also significant levels of autonomy and authority in making content determinations. School management will require its own aligned programme of professional development and theoretical grounding if this major national initiative is to succeed.

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.

One of the many lessons we learned from the junior cycle experience was the importance of a communications strategy, particularly aimed at informing and reassuring parents and guardians. In essence this was neglected since 2015 and school leaders and teachers found themselves having to answer many unanswerable questions, manage expectations and anxieties and reassure parents that their children were to experience a high quality educational experience with different but nonetheless more appropriate learning outcomes and skills better suited to contemporary life than was hitherto the case.

The greatest risk in communication is when you think you have communicated. Pdfs and PowerPoints are not sufficient and, again, our school principals will require significant levels of information, insight and intuition as it is they who are at the front line when it comes to bringing parents with us on the new learning journey. If we do not liberate our country's principals from the

oppressive administrative burden they carry, our leaders will not have the temporal or psychic space to absorb, reflect, formulate and communicate the key messages of the new framework. Finally, the acknowledgement of the importance of Patron's Programmes in the draft framework is appreciated. The emergence of both wellbeing and ethical education are equally welcome, though care must be taken to avoid encroachment by such newer areas of learning into the time allowed for the Patron's Programme to be adequately delivered.

Beannacht Dé ar an obair!

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.

Thank you for your submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie