

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	Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) Team
Position	
Organisation	Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
Date	26 th November 2020
E-mail	

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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).

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*.

We welcome the publication of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework. An exceptional, empowering document that values every child as a learner and places their interests to the fore, grounded in research to support children's progression. This is an aspirational framework; if we can aspire to achieve the long term goals contained within it, this will benefit us as a society. The inclusion of the vision and overarching principles as well as the key competencies are a positive aspect of this framework - these provide an overview for the holistic development of children through the different curricular areas and make connections with the wider community.

Advisors believe that direct communication with teachers will be necessary for them to discuss, explore and digest some of these proposed changes in practice. Visible support and guidelines will be necessary to allow teachers to feel encouraged to engage with the pedagogical practices outlined in this framework. An incremental approach to embedding practice step by step could ensure teachers have time to implement these great ideals. For example, the seven competencies and the described attributes underpin the whole framework so this could be a good starting point. The area of whole-school and long-term planning is an area where teachers will require support, bearing in mind the centrality of teacher agency and flexibility in this document. Ideally, this would be in place from the outset of the framework rollout.

The frontloading of the principles of inclusive education, assessment, pedagogy and child-centred approaches in the framework are welcome. However, a balance needs to be reached between the reality of inclusive practice and the challenges this presents in various contexts.

The challenges experienced due to the lack of the framework previous to the introduction of the PLC need to be acknowledged in order to give teachers confidence to move forward with curricular change with a firmer foundation. The practicalities of implementation in terms of timetable, school and classroom preparation, accountability and professional development will determine the ultimate success of what is a well-researched, child-centred, forward-thinking document.

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.

Strengths

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework offers information and guidance that supports the teacher's role as an autonomous professional. The use of the term '*agentic professional*' in the vision statement and the descriptor provided are welcome. The acknowledgement and elaboration on the four aspects of pedagogy (p. 21) that are central to how teachers exercise their agency and flexibility is a positive aspect of the framework. The integration of areas in stages one and two will likely provide teachers with better opportunities to engage in more meaningful lessons on account of time flexibility.

Recommendations and Questions

1. Time allocations

Advisors believe clarity may be required around minimum curriculum time and flexible time, particularly around monthly allocations. In relation to flexible time, teacher's preferences could mean that this time is allocated to the subjects they enjoy teaching rather than the areas that the students need support with.

Advisors are concerned with the following statement '*this approach reduces the likelihood of a*

particular curriculum area receiving too much or too little attention thereby ensuring that children have a broad and balanced learning experience' (p.15). Support for teachers would be vital to ensure their use of flexible time ensures children do have broad and balanced learning experiences.

2. Agency and Flexibility

Strategic planning will be important to ensure all areas are adequately represented within the monthly timetable. Clear communication of expectations need to be provided to all teachers to avoid ambiguity. With the shift in the framework from learning objectives to learning outcomes, teachers need to be supported to consider their own context and what flexibility and agency will mean for them. Some teachers simply may not feel confident with the idea of agency and flexibility, as these principles may not be to the fore in their own context. To assist teachers, supplementary material may be beneficial. For example, a section on 'Working as an Agentic Professional' that highlights expectations and gives examples of what that looks like in classrooms and schools could be beneficial.

3. Planning

Teachers require guidance around planning that would support them in accessing the new curriculum framework in a meaningful way. Some aspects that need to be addressed include:

- How could values, competencies and attitudes be included in a long term plan? The current way of 'writing up' plans doesn't lend itself to this.
- What support will be forthcoming with regard to planning? It is mentioned that support is being provided, what will this look like? What form will it take?
- With regard to whole school planning - what role will agency have here?
- How is it envisaged that attitudes, values, dispositions as well as skills, concepts and knowledge will be included in long term plans?

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*.

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- 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.

Strengths

The framework provides clear links between preschool, primary and post-primary and this is welcomed. The documents such as Mo Scéal and My Passport will be excellent tools for schools to provide certain information about incoming children with regard to strengths and needs and for parents to provide knowledge about their child/children's educational journey.

The continuity between the themes of Aistear, EEC Framework the Primary and Post-Primary Curriculum are very clear. Moving away from subject areas in the early primary years will support continuity of the themes and approaches in the Aistear Framework and will allow for playful and engaging learning experiences at primary level. Connecting with what and how children learn at home is key to their overall development. The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework highlights this importance.

Recommendations and Questions:

1. Aistear

Aistear is not underpinned by legislation and early childhood settings are not mandated to implement Aistear. Given that Aistear is central to the continuity of learning to the themes and competencies outlined in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework, is this going to change? The implementation of Aistear and playful pedagogical approaches varies from setting to setting and school to school. Not all teachers have received training. More support for teachers will be needed, particularly if the thematic approach based on Aistear is being extended through stages 1 and 2.

2. Parental Involvement

The document highlights the importance of parental involvement in their child/children's education, however, the document reads as though the parents are 'receptors' of their child's education as opposed to 'active agents'. We feel that more emphasis and guidance should be

included with regard to 'how' parents can support their child through the transitions from preschool up to Junior Cycle.

While we feel that yearly transitions from class to class are very important, we query whether teachers would feel that there is enough time to address this transition with each child in their class. Perhaps, this is just happening with children who have been identified in advance of the transition. However, in smaller schools, the transition from the 'small room' to the 'big' room is a huge transition for some pupils and there is scope to address this in the framework.

3. Transitions and Continuity

Teacher knowledge of Early Childhood, Primary and Post-Primary education now appears to be necessary to ensure continuity and progression.

- Will post-primary teachers receive input on the areas of the curricular changes at primary level and vice versa to assist with transitions?
- With continuity in mind, it would be excellent to demonstrate how Senior Cycle connects with these transitions?
- Whose responsibility is it to monitor these transitions and the accompanying paperwork? (Mo Scéal and My Passport)
- Are all schools fulfilling the requirement to pass on adequate information? Could more be added to these transition documents? Authentic communication is essential.

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.

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.

Strengths:

A positive step forward is acknowledged as dispositions and values are being incorporated into the curriculum with a shift away from a content focused curriculum. The key competencies mentioned are very relevant for preparing children for the 21st century. The broad and interconnected nature of the learning outcomes supports inclusive practice, the hope being that the seven competencies would be embedded across the curriculum and the learning outcomes would be developed through an interdisciplinary approach.

In relation to the key competencies, these are very much societal, not solely the responsibility of schools and should be rooted in the home and community. It may be beneficial to make this connection clearer in the document. With the key competencies signalling a shift from objective based curricula to an outcome based curriculum framework encompassing concepts, skills, disposition, attitudes and values, we suggest that pages 8-12 (or a summary of these) from Professor Carol McGuinness’ paper ‘*Research Informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Curriculum*’ be made available to all teachers. This would support their understanding of this emerging terminology. Ongoing professional development will be crucial especially around the area of key competencies. We would like to suggest that teachers be given a projected road map to ensure them that they will get the sufficient support needed.

Recommendations and Questions

1. Acquisition of L3/language awareness

School Choice for L3

- What is the role of school choice in relation to the L3?
- Will the teaching of L3 be outsourced? Who will fund it if this is the case?
- If the teaching of the L3 is outsourced, how can the school ensure that the person

responsible has the required pedagogical knowledge?

- Would the provision of the L3 be based on the student demographic?
- With regard to the L3, would the language competence model be suitable at stage 4 in every school context?
- Would some schools benefit from a language awareness approach at both stages 3 and 4?
Could this be an option for schools?

CPD for L3

With regard to L3, teachers will need further support in CPD with pedagogical approaches for language acquisition.

2. Gaeilge

The absence of distinguished time allocations for Gaeilge in some of the timetable options is a concern. Without sufficient provision of time for Gaeilge, this could have a detrimental effect on the teaching and learning of the language.

3. Key Competencies

With the importance of environmental awareness becoming ever more apparent, we suggest that environmental awareness/stewardship be included as an additional key competency. If the curriculum is asking '*what is the purpose of primary education for tomorrow's child?*' we would deem that environmental awareness (separate from 'being an active citizen' competency) would be crucial and a priority as we face an ever escalating climate crisis.

Regarding the positioning of the key competencies on page 8; the competencies appear to be listed in alphabetical order but each are dependent on communication and using language. Therefore, communication and language should be given a primary position as it underpins and is the foundation of all other competencies.

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

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- 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.

Strengths:

The document demonstrates the links between the key competencies and Aistear and have acknowledged the continuity that exists from preschool to second level. The development of the key competencies as well as the inclusion of the principles of highly effective teaching and learning are a positive aspect of the framework. Key components of the specifications for the other four curriculum areas as laid out in Table 3 on page 12 of the printed version are welcome. The introduction of minimum curriculum time and flexible time is seen as a welcome development. The support of ‘guidelines and examples of how this time allocation can be used will be developed’ will be useful to schools in deciding how to use their flexible time allocation. Figure 3 on page 11 (print version) clearly outlines the curriculum areas and subjects in stages. The reasons for having two curriculum areas including subjects for stages 1 and 2 are included.

Change brings opportunities, new thinking and possibilities. In addition, it brings challenges, uncertainty and disruption (p. 26). Advisors felt it was important to see the magnitude of this change acknowledged in the document and we would suggest that more detail could be provided on how schools are to be supported in implementing this change.

Recommendations and Questions:

1. SEN

With regard to inclusion and the place of SEN, perhaps this needs to be teased out further in the document. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is mentioned but needs more attention. It is assuming that all teachers know what this is. The inclusion of UDL is seen as a positive movement but are teachers aware of this and do they understand it? It supports being proactive as opposed to reactive in relation to special education.

- Inclusive education (p. 20): Moving away from thinking about ability and disability, instead to look at variability, competency and opportunity.

2. Progression continua

In the components in curriculum specification (p. 12) there is no mention of progression continua for the remaining curriculum areas - wellbeing, arts education, social and environmental education and religious/ethical/multi-belief education - patron's programme'. Are these to be omitted? The progression continua are an excellent support to teachers by describing the children's anticipated trajectory. Will the toolkit support be enough with them? In the absence of the progression continua, there is an expectation and assumption that teachers are au fait with learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are so general and teachers need support, particularly when there is such a big shift expected and it is such a new way of approaching education.

3. Integration

Page 11 of the framework states that *'the curriculum areas are interrelated and overlap'*. Advisors suggested that those links may need to be made apparent to teachers.

4. Resources, Structures and Processes

The document outlines that *'detailed planning on resources, structures and processes is yet to take place'* (p. 4). Advisors felt that it would be important that teachers are involved in the creation of these plans.

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.

Support variety of pedagogical approaches

Strengths:

Advisors welcomed the fact that the term ‘pedagogy’ is teased out in this section and that teachers are described as ‘*committed, skilful and agentic professionals*’.

1. Interactions

This section highlights the importance of interactions and the relationships within the school community and how these contribute to a responsive pedagogy. *The curriculum recognises the value of the full range of interactions - informal and formal, planned and incidental, social or cognitive - between the teacher and children as contributing to the quality of the children’s learning environment and experiences’* (p. 21).

Advisors felt that the links with Aistear are very clear in this section. The importance of the quality of the interactions between the teacher and the child are highlighted. This may encourage teachers to reflect on their interactions and to realise the significance of their interactions with

children.

2. Professional Preparation

The professional preparation that the teacher carries out is also acknowledged as a critical part of their pedagogy. Traditionally, this preparation would have referred to short-term plans and cuntais míosúla whereas in this document the value of teachers preparing their learning environments for the various learning experiences planned throughout the day is also acknowledged. *'In addition, the planning and the preparation that the teacher carries out to, for example, prepare the learning environment and the resources that will provide opportunities for the children to play, explore, inquire, experiment and discover, are critical contributions to pedagogy'* (p. 22). The various pedagogical approaches and strategies that teachers choose to use in tailoring their learning experiences are considered and flexibility is encouraged in their use at various stages.

Recommendations and Questions:

1. Active Learning Methodologies

The framework mentions pedagogical strategies and approaches repeatedly but a list of might be useful: Inquiry-based learning/project work/involvement with local initiatives/child-led play.

- Would it be worth having a separate section on pedagogical approaches?
- If play and playful teaching and learning is one of the underpinning principles of the new curriculum is it given enough weight in this framework?
- Have teachers enough experience / understanding of the pedagogical approaches noted i.e. inquiry-based learning.

Active methodologies are mentioned in the introduction however; they are not explicitly mentioned again. They are implied through the pedagogical approaches mentioned.

The previous emphasis on dialogic teaching approaches provided clarity in understanding the nature of active learning methodologies the learning outcomes demanded. Advisors feel these strong connections need to be emphasised more in the finalised framework.

Assessment

Strengths:

Advisors welcomed the inclusion of assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning in this document and the fact that the recommendations and concluding comments from the paper commissioned by the NCCA (2019) *'Aligning Assessment Learning and Teaching in Curricular Reform and Implementation'* are included in this framework.

1. Key Messages

The three important key messages regarding assessment are very succinct. Figure 4 on page 23 of the printed document outlines the three types of assessment ranging from 'intuitive' to 'planned interactions' to 'assessment events' clearly. It is positive to see intuitive assessment acknowledged and that it does not require *'extensive planning or reporting'*. Teachers may still want to know what evidence of this type of assessment will look like.

2. Standardised Testing

Advisors welcomed that status afforded to standardised testing - *'it is not necessarily more important than other types of assessment in which teachers and children are involved during classroom activity'*. Advisors felt it was important that all forms of assessment are seen to be equally valid and one form of assessment will never capture a child's true capabilities and potential.

3. Peer Assessment and Self-Assessment

Involving the children in assessing their own work and that of their peers is developed in this document. *'Providing children with regular time to talk about their work and to identify and reflect on their next steps contributes to their self-identity as learners while peer-assessment enables children to support and extend each other's learning'*. This has clear links with the quality of interactions between teacher and child as this will be what the children will model their peer observations and feedback on. Advisors felt that the 'learning to be a learner is a very important competency and that it feeds into self-assessment and peer assessment. Advisors welcomed the importance of the place of the child in assessment as seen in Figure 5 on page 25 of the printed document. It highlights the status of the child as *'the central stakeholder that benefits from assessment information, directly and indirectly'*.

Recommendations and Questions:

1. The Continuum of Assessment

The terminology around the continuum of assessment is confusing by labelling both with the same term. There are now two continua of assessment which are related but this could cause confusion (in the Draft Framework and in the *NCCA (2007) Assessment in the Primary School Guidelines*).

- Are these continua going to be merged? This would need to be addressed and teachers supported to develop their understanding of and use of a wide variety of assessment practices and that assessment is a critical part of teaching and learning as opposed to an add on.
- Are there any plans to update the *NCCA Assessment in the Primary School Guidelines (2007)* to bring them in line with what is presented in the new framework?

2. Key Competencies

As the key competencies will be central in the new framework, there is a possibility for strong links to be made between the competencies and classroom practice e.g. link with assessment and 'learning to become a learner'. There is an expectation to gather, record, use and report information on a child's progress and achievement in developing knowledge, skills, concepts dispositions and now competencies. This is a lovely addition to building a picture of the child as a learner but will certainly add to the teacher workload.

- Do teachers have any guidance on how to assess competencies?
- Do the learning outcomes in each area link explicitly to different competencies?
- One would wonder if there can be any meaningful long term planning if the purpose of assessment is '*to influence the nature and direction of teaching and learning in real time*'? (p. 24)

The framework recognises that '*it will be necessary, in time, to review the suite of reporting templates that are currently available to schools to align them with the redeveloped primary curriculum*'. Advisors welcome this change.

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.

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- 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.

Strengths

This key message highlights the need for a balanced approach to the framework - acknowledging the positive practices that emerged from the implementation of the 1999 curriculum and how these can be continued. Upon reading, it is clear that strong links are being made to ensure continuity from preschool through to junior cycle. This has been discussed previously and is a welcome change.

1. Societal Change

The changes in society over the last 20 years are reflected and embraced in the document - advances in technology, different experiences of family life, different cultures, different beliefs and viewpoints, different abilities and needs etc. The inclusion of concepts, skills, dispositions, values, competencies and principles are all welcomed in preparing children for the society in which they will be living.

Recommendations and Questions:

1. Responding to National Priorities or Needs

Schools and the curriculum, together, are often viewed as a critical site for responding to national priorities or needs and addressing societal problems. This is evident in calls for increased time to be allocated to existing curriculum areas such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and to Physical Education (PE). Additionally, there are demands to include new aspects of learning in the curriculum such as Coding and Computational Thinking, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, Modern Foreign Languages, and to place a greater general emphasis on Wellbeing.

- One must wonder where the role of education begins and ends? Can we continue to add more 'emerging priorities' to a curriculum?
- One intention of the draft primary framework is to address curriculum overload but is that lost when we add more priorities?
- Finally, how is it envisaged that current practice regarding the Patron's program will fit with the proposal for Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics?

2. Support

Support will be crucial for schools to implement this correctly.

- As content, knowledge, dispositions/attitudes/values are used interchangeably, advisors feel that teachers may benefit from a glossary in order to fully understand the curriculum framework.
- Advisors would welcome further clarification regarding *'taking stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes'*.
- It may be advantageous to circulate page 6 (Principles of high quality teaching and learning) and page 10 (Key competencies for children) of the printed document to all teachers and students in colleges of education to encourage and support conversations/debate about education in Irish primary schools moving forward.
- Advisors felt that integration, assessment and inclusion need to be constantly front loaded as opposed to subjects.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

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