

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

Organisation submission details

Name	Seóna Ní Bhriain
Position	Head of Young People, Children and Education
Organisation	The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon
Date	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 provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

The Arts Council of Ireland is the Irish government agency for developing the arts. We work in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policy makers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

In preparing our submission, we consulted with Creative Associates currently supporting schools around the country as part of the Creative Schools programme, and we have incorporated some of their comments into this submission.

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.

Section 1

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

Please see attached cover letter.

Overall, we welcome the draft curriculum framework, and we commend the NCCA on the in-depth process to date that has informed its development. The draft framework acknowledges and builds on the positives of the 1999 curriculum, which encouraged an approach to learning where children were happier and actively engaged in their learning in school, and in which arts education was encouraged. It also addresses key challenges – particularly with regard to curriculum overload. The connections with Aistear and the Framework for Junior Cycle make sense.

Exciting elements in this framework include the **agency** given to children and teachers, **potential for more fluid crossover** between curriculum areas; the value placed on each child; a more **enquiry based approach** to learning, and the potential for **flexibility** overall.

The emphasis on **diversity and inclusion**, on variability, ethics, social justice, and the environment are all important. The value in articulating all of this clearly in a framework document has been underlined by recent global events. This context creates a framework in which children's learning in and through the arts can thrive, allowing children to explore different modes of expression as they learn and respond to the world around them, whether unpacking the environmental challenges they have been served by previous generations, or appreciating the diversity of cultures and experiences their classroom and their world includes.

It is very encouraging that arts education is one of the five core curriculum areas, while the framework also emphasises key **competencies**, such as being creative, fostering wellbeing, being an active citizen, communicating and using language, all of which are developed through meaningful engagement with the arts.

Overall, there is a lot of potential for the arts to play a central role across the new curriculum. This potential for cross-curricular approaches could be made more explicit. The role of the arts in language, social and environmental education, and wellbeing in particular could be emphasised.

While we recognise the difficulties of curriculum overload that the framework seeks to address, it is concerning that there is so little time allocated comparatively to the arts and that this then reduces in the senior classes. We welcome that there will be scope for children to learn across a broader range of arts areas within the arts education specification, beyond drama, music and visual arts. However, time – as well as teachers' skills, confidence, and meaningful partnerships - will ultimately determine how deeply children can engage and explore such a rich and diverse area of practices.

The Arts Council welcomes the inclusion of dance within arts education, as well as the range of possibilities that a broad focus on arts education will facilitate. Increased time, and a clear connection to other curricular areas through which that time could be further expanded, would be helpful. For example, it appears that the flexibility given to teachers potentially provides scope

to expand arts projects beyond arts education into flexible time, wellbeing, languages, and other subject areas that can be richly and meaningfully explored through the arts.

The Arts Council has previously assisted the NCCA development group process for arts subjects at junior and senior cycle, and we would welcome the opportunity to do this for the **arts education specification** at the next stage in the development of the primary curriculum, across the range of practices this will encompass. We also welcome opportunities to provide ideas and examples of how the various competencies can be supported through arts experiences and learning across subject areas.

The **implementation phase** of the framework will of course also be key. Creative Schools, and Creative Associates could play an important role here. The framework mirrors the approach and thinking behind Creative Schools – including flexibility, agency, ownership/voice, and learning in and through the arts. The Arts Council previously initiated Arts in Junior Cycle in response to the Framework for Junior Cycle. This coupled the skills of practitioners in the arts with teaching professionals to support rich engagement with the arts in school. Creative Schools was informed by that experience, and we welcome opportunities for further partnership.

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.

Agency and flexibility are key.

Flexibility creates more scope for project-based work. Being able to plan projects that take place over time instead of week to week, and being able to spend a full day on one area or project, enables creative and engaged learning much better than short segments.

More agency for teachers enables them to respond to the needs of the class.

Flexibility enables the arts to be a powerful cross-curricular tool. Flexible time provides scope for creative projects led by children, and engagement with community arts and cultural organisations.

These concepts are excellent, but will take support to implement.

There are limitations in the hours for the arts in the current curriculum, and it has not always been easy to make the case for other subject hours towards a creative project.

Currently, the rigidity of curriculum and assessment can be in conflict with the voice of the child.

Creative Associates have noted that teachers who have been trained in the voice of the child are better able to respond to children's needs.

The emphasis on variability instead of ability/disability is positive and progressive.

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.

These connections are important. Aistear and the Framework for Junior Cycle were very positive developments. It is of course disappointing that there are fewer arts education opportunities at second level. Senior cycle in particular will benefit from reform.

Arts projects are ideal in helping children to manage transitions – it’s possible to include children of different ages, and build bridges by working collaboratively on an activity across primary/post-primary. (For example, an arts day organised across a number of schools, primary and post-primary.)

Informal activities such as after school clubs might also provide an opportunity to support transitions through the arts. It is a very uneven playing field in terms of children’s access to arts learning and experiences at home.

In visual arts – currently children coming into post-primary are not prepared to engage with the junior cycle framework. They have had too much focus on product over process, and on technical skills over development of ideas – whereas both are important. From an Arts Education perspective, there are benefits to building on the approach in Aistear, through Primary, and on into Junior Cycle.

There is scope for an enhanced role for the arts in meeting the aspirations of the curriculum, in terms of integration and inclusion happening through collective projects.

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.

The proposed emphasis on broader arts education is positive. The Framework correctly notes ‘while disciplines within arts education have a common creative process and share transferable skills, each has its own knowledge, concepts and skills.’ It also acknowledges the importance of ‘enabling schools to engage with local, national and international initiatives and opportunities.’

It will be important for schools to have access to professional arts practitioners to support teachers; and to ensure initial teacher education can give teachers the time, confidence and skills to teach these areas. With regard to arts education, teachers will need specialist skills in the arts, or access to specialist teachers to support their work.

It would be good to make more explicit connections between arts education and other areas, to ensure time for the arts is maximised.

The competencies are welcome overall. Being Creative as a key competency is welcome. The attributes in the table are clearer than the paragraph in the document.

With regard to communicating and using language, and exploring and creating a variety of texts – opportunities for children to express themselves and respond to ideas across a range of arts and media could be emphasised here.

The competencies are not mutually exclusive – to develop one competency, you need to develop another (this is reflected in the way the competencies are presented in the framework). There

could be greater emphasis on integration of curriculum areas. Subjects could be taught as themes, and integrated seamlessly with one another.

It is important to ensure there is time and space for the voice of the child in planning activities. This leads to a much better level of engagement than a top-down approach from artists/teachers/school tradition.

Children need to be supported to develop critical faculties based on knowledge, and to develop dispositions, values and attitudes to be responsible, informed and engaged citizens. Creative approaches to learning help to develop these attributes across all curriculum areas and more explicit connections between arts education and the competencies should ensure time for learning through and in the arts is maximised.

The potential of digital learning has been highlighted in recent months. However, the limitations of digital learning at primary level are also evident. Our views are mixed in response to this aspect.

Increased time on physical activity and wellbeing is welcome.

We are unclear around the use of the term 'being spiritual' under wellbeing, and perhaps clarification is needed.

The Patron's programme would benefit from curriculum supports that demonstrate an inclusive approach to this aspect of the curriculum that all schools can draw on. It is important to acknowledge that children attending their local national school are likely to come from diverse backgrounds. Curriculum supports should be available for schools to ensure that children from different religions, or none, have opportunities to learn, develop and flourish across the full curriculum, regardless of the school they attend.

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.

Challenging and changing the current structure and presentation of the primary school curriculum is necessary to prevent curriculum overload; and to support emphasis on broader and more inclusive approaches to education.

The proposed inclusion of flexible time, in addition to curriculum areas is welcomed.

The inclusion of arts education as a core curriculum area is positive.

Some specific comments on the curriculum as proposed are as follows:

- Emphasis on arts education and being creative are very positive progressions
- Hours for arts education are of concern
- Potential within the arts education strand, to expand beyond current subjects and include artforms such as dance, film, architecture etc.
- The role of the arts in language could be more explicitly emphasised

In order to achieve all of these changes, scaffolding and supports will be needed for teachers, in particular in relation to transitions between key stages. Teachers need to be supported to deliver arts education in the best and most meaningful way, through engagement with artists as part of their Initial Teacher Education, through professional development, and engagement with artists/arts experiences in the classroom and beyond.

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.

The shift to a more child-centred approach to learning, which starts where each child is at, is positive. In addition, the flexibility proposed for each teacher, should support a much richer experience for both teacher and students. Building good relationships, are key to success, including in learning, and the proposed approaches and strategies should support richer learning experiences for all.

A more inclusive approach should provide more opportunities to be creative and innovative, lending itself towards the development of a high-quality arts education.

There is great potential for cross-curricular creative projects that involve the community, leading to rich learning experiences, increased wellbeing and confidence building.

Creative Schools could support the development and implementation of the new framework.

The emphasis on meaningful and collaborative assessment is very positive. The language used around assessment is very important and should foster a ‘Have a go’ attitude, rather than fear of being wrong. Children should be given more independence to assess their own work and capabilities.

Similarly, teachers learn and are motivated to find their best way of teaching by experiencing different professional development, and self-assessment/reflection.

Overall, the framework could place more emphasis on the voices of children and the diverse perspectives and experiences they bring for each other, i.e. peer to peer learning/active and group learning.

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.

Curriculum overload has been a hindering factor of the '99 curriculum, which has a strong philosophical base. The proposed new framework does a good job at addressing this. It reflects the changing needs of schools and captures what remains positive from previous curriculum and what needs to be changed.

This curriculum places considered, progressive values to the fore, with its focus on diversity, inclusivity, and on variability.

Overloaded curriculum reflects an overload of information, which can be difficult to navigate. The framework does a good job at addressing this. It will allow young people to discover how they love to learn, and from there, have the skills to navigate a wide range of information – a great foundation for all future learning.

It should be noted that there is still some concern that the curriculum will be filled up easily again with a new language and rigid timetable, or ethical religious instruction overly used in flexible hours. Timetabling and subject area development, including what is meant by flexible time, are key to addressing this.

An immersion in the arts is key to intelligent understanding of a complex world. This framework makes this possible.

Data Protection

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Thank you for your submission.

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